A Criminal's Best Asset is His Lie Ability

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A Criminal's Best Asset is His Lie Ability

by amoralagent

Summary

"There's no reason to hurt me, is there?" He spoke again, not expecting an answer, "Do you want to hurt me?" Will quelled a smile, thinking of the night's events.

Thieves AU! Will breaks into an apparently empty house, and things don't go according to plan.

Chapter 1

Will was surprised to find the door unlocked when he tried the handle on a whim. It's not that he'd just happened to be in the area, in fact, the whole street made him feel disastrously out of place, all upstate and prissy and abundant, seemingly more so at night. He'd been a few blocks over at a house he'd been casing for weeks- wore his gloves, hell, he'd even shaved his hair short for the deed. Eventually, he had got the latch on the window broken so he could hop inside, when his foot got caught and he fell flat on his fucking face. Swearing, he only just got up on his hands and knees when he heard a few faint beeps that turned into a screeching alarm. The lights blared on, and halfway to the door a guy bolted downstairs with a baseball bat.

In the rush of it all, he'll admit that he got a little carried away. Once he'd wrestled the bat off the guy when he got a few hits in, Will had near enough bludgeoned him to death. He probably would've done so too, if it weren't for the police sirens that started wailing up the street.

One of the officers shouted at him as he dived back out of the window, but he took off. Spitting blood and breathlessly laughing. Maybe he heard gunshots, maybe he didn't. And he didn't stop running until he couldn't anymore, choosing to hide in a stupidly expansive hedgerow for as long as it took for the sirens to dissipate and quieten altogether. Then he reemerged, pulled his hood up, pocketed his bloodied gloves, and walked around a bit; found an extravagant house that looked vacant and figured, *hey, why the fuck not?*

He opened the door gingerly and slunk inside, pulling down his hood. The place smelt far too clean and dusty at the same time, as if it was hardly lived in: *just his luck.*

Moonlight trickled in to give the space at least some light, so Will was able to see how the entry way led straight into the kitchen area, and a downward staircase off to his left, probably leading to a basement. It was opulent, all creams and whites- the round glass table right in front of him was decorated by some white lilies that looked more accustomed to being at a funeral. A few good bust statues, and tall plants, and dull paintings. Will absently thought it looked like a rich man's medical facility.

Whilst he wiped the blood from his lips on his way to the kitchen, he wondered how much he'd had to eat. *Fucking up a job works up quite an appetite.* Once he saw the bowl of fruit on the kitchen island his mind was made up. Swiping what he assumed was either a plum or an apple, he was about to take a bite, until the lights were suddenly flicked on, and he actually froze.

"Hello," A stranger greeted, throwing something plastic into the bin. The warm accent caught Will even more off-guard. And the man was striking, high cheekbones and prominent lips more like an animated grecian statue than an actual person. His eyes looked red in the shadows. Will became acutely aware of the filleting knife in his back pocket: "Is it food you want?" Will just looked at him, "You can take it." Not that he was asking for permission.

It occurred to Will that this man didn't look like he belonged there in his fancy waistcoat and tailored trousers. He wore richer colours; certainly wouldn't suit a house so stark and open, and so meagrely furnished. Will imagined him in a house of crimsons and deep blues. Ravishing. Old furniture accented with golds and-- *bones?*

"There's no reason to hurt me, is there?" He spoke again, not expecting an answer, "Do you want to hurt me?" Will quelled a smile, thinking of the night's events. The questions weren't laced with a hint of fear, and he didn't look like someone who'd be scared easy- even if he did notice Will's smile, "Are you going to?"

"No." Will decided after a moment, "I won't hurt you."

He quirked a brow, clearly surprised that he even replied, "Good. Then you can take some fruit, and go. Are we agreed?" Will stepped towards him, still staring, then looked to the fruit and put another apple into his hoodie pocket for later. He bit into the one in his hand.

There was a silence of doing naught but supposedly sizing each other up, broken now and again by Will's chewing and the snap of another bite. Will leant up against the counter slightly and noticed the bag slung over the man's shoulder; it seemed his wandering eye was noticed, the man tilting his head fractionally, questioning. When Will swallowed and opened his mouth to speak, there was the distinct grumble of gravel outside and headlights cut in through the windows. They both looked towards it, then they met each other's gaze again. He wasn't as concerned as Will was, "There's someone here. We have to go."

Will scowled, "Who's here?"

"I can't be sure. This isn't my house." Before Will could find his words, he was quickly following him out the back door, around the side of the house, and into a fucking Bentley. Will stuttered, stopping before climbing in, and the man leaned over the console, surprisingly amused, "Do you want to be caught? I'd recommend you get in." Trying not to think about it too much, grumbling under his breath, Will threw the rest of his apple as far as he could and jumped in. The car sped off the minute the front door was opened.

"It escapes me that you're already in the privacy of my car, and I didn't even get your name." There he was, speaking again. He kept glancing over at him too- *eyes on the fucking road, huh?* Will sighed passably, thinking how he'd get out of this, "Do you have a name?"

He turned his face more towards the window, to the stars and streetlights beyond, "Will." He offered, obviously reluctant.

"Are you always this quiet, Will?" He sighed deeper this time, trying to sate his irritation, scratching the stubble at his jaw. Perhaps he could make a break for it at the next stoplight, "You're rather quick to trust, Will." That earned a scoff, "Getting in the car of a man you've just met. At a house that wasn't his."

"I trust you?" Will sneered, looking at him.

"You don't know me."

His tone turned condescending, *"Yeah, you're right,"* He took out the spare apple and rubbed it on his trousers, "And I don't want to." The car rolled to a stop when the light switched to red, and he immediately got out of the car, turning back and raising the apple as if to toast him. The man went to speak, but Will took a bite, "Thanks for the gift," He offered around the mouthful, before darting across the street, and walking off, like nothing ever happened.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> "Son of a-- *wait*." He knew that face, that smug look, that offensive amount of checkered Italian wool-blend, "You've gotta be kidding me."
>
> Ah, they meet again. Something tells me Will isn't going to be best pleased.

Chapter Notes

> Thank you for reading and all the comments cheering me on to continue! Sorry for the wait!
>
> Watch out for the innuendos, by the way- I feel like you need to be forewarned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There are an amassment of things Hannibal Lecter will never admit to, and counted among them is the fact that, now and again, for a couple of weeks after the incident, he changed his route to his office to go through the same street that he last saw Will on. Arguably, it was more of a subconscious choice. In any regard, he'd met the man *once*, halfway to a *murder* in the middle of the night, *in someone else's house*. It wasn't exactly the foundation of a dreamlike and fruitful relationship.

Besides, Hannibal had chosen *not* to drive back to Chilton's to finish what he started before being quite rudely interrupted. It was pure luck that the cowardly excuse for a man hadn't just turned tail, and scuttled off to the FBI when he found his house broken into- the only thing stolen being a couple of apples, and left, were Will's fingerprints.

Respectively, Hannibal figured the course of the night's events had veered away from his plans for a good reason- a quiet reason, with abstruse blue-grey eyes, and unremarkable wit. Rude, too. Perhaps, if he'd locked the doors of his car, or didn't decide to turn the kitchen light on, the night would've ended in a death. Whose death was harder to say- as assured as he was that he could've killed him if he wanted to, Will wasn't predictable. Judging by his injuries, and the scent of adrenaline and blood, he certainly wasn't unaccustomed to violence. Intriguing, nonetheless.

He was under no illusions of the Hellenistic ideas of fate; the meeting was odd, tense, and utterly rendered to circumstance. Hannibal was no stranger to any of those nuances. But, for

the first time in decades, he'd met someone particularly fascinating that he couldn't initially understand- and it seemed requited.

Even so, Hannibal knew the realistic chances of seeing Will again, let alone meeting him, were rather implausible.

Still, he could hope.

Will, on the other hand, had forgotten about it. *Well*, pretty much. He hadn't thought about it a lot anyway, getting caught up in how to get his next score by the weekend to be able to pay next months bills, and have money left for dog food *and* human food. It's fair to say there are few people who need boat motors fixed in the middle of Wolf Trap, but he got the occasional engine to reassemble, and it paid well. Not enough though.

That's what led him to taking little trips to Baltimore, or Richmond, or really, anywhere more substantial, hence would pay better. It came with the added bonus of no one knowing to suspect him.

The day started with watery sunshine that struggled past the clouds, slinking in through the half-uncovered window to cut Will's face in half. Stirring with a groan, he turned over onto his front, unaware of the time, unaware of the weight of the day. Just as he was losing his balance in toeing the edge of consciousness, one of the dogs licked at his outstretched hand and startled him awake. A bizarre realisation occurred to him that he hadn't been woken up by a tongue in a long time. He snorted a laugh.

He went on a run with the dogs after all of them were fed, showering and redressing once he came home, before leaving. The plan involved catching a train to one of the flea markets in Baltimore that he liked to frequent. It was always under a low bypass, and shaded from the sun. Shoddy tables blanketed with fresh bread wrapped in paper, or exotic fruit being hounded by wasps and lost bees, circled by crowds. An array of people all socialising, negotiating, and sometimes arguing loudly; music floating in the background from somewhere- either from a busker, or a stereo, floating on the air under the freeway that made the space seem innocuously owned and private. Ripe for the pick(pocket)ing.

Will has always been good with his hands. Even as a child, he'd never got his fingers caught in doors or snapped between drawers; his reflexes often rivalled that of a cat, more likened to being like the jarred, spasmodic movements of small birds. Twitchy. Ever since he'd witnessed his dad being involved in an accident with the nasty end of a fishing line, he became startlingly aware of the fragility of his own hands. And the strength. His natural dexterity was useful when it came to fixing motors, and stealing valuables.

Being so nimble and well paced with his fingers always came in handy.

Slight of hand had always been easy, and fascinating. Especially when watching other's reaction. Or, *lack* of reaction. If and when it suited him.

Wandering around the market, and partly indulging in the synaesthesia of the place, he'd intermittently stumble into the corner of a table, and a piece of jewellery would strangely

vanish, bump into a stranger and they'd lose their watch, charm his way out of conversations with the shake of a hand left ringless. Providing an empty pocket here and there.

He didn't look the part, a little scruffy maybe, but in plaid, khakis, and a battered corduroy jacket, he didn't fit stereotypes. Definitely not with a face like his.

Popping a piece of gum into his mouth, he took a little moment to privately smile at how bovine it all seemed. People milled together like witless cattle, bartering and giggling; unaware of his pockets full of stranger's gold, and leather, and stolen identities. Fucking comical, really. He hardly noticed as someone in a long coat stepped out directly in front of him and he smacked straight into them: "Son of a-- *wait*." He knew that face, that smug look, that offensive amount of checkered Italian wool-blend, "You've gotta be kidding me."

"I don't believe I am." He straightened up, readjusting his hold of a plastic bag that'd almost fallen from his grip, and turned to face towards him. Tall and broad and curious. Will took a step back, and pushed his hands into his pockets, "If I'm not mistaken, you're Will, without a surname. Our last meeting came to an abrupt and disappointing end." Will hummed disinterestedly whilst chewing, and looked for a way to move past him. The man cut into his line of sight, "Am I allowed to introduce myself this time, or am I keeping you from the impressive task of stealing more apples?" That caught Will's attention. And the attention of one or two sellers, the gaze of whom were ignored, too busy looking at each other.

He didn't look at all like he belonged there, three-piece suit and slicked back hair, looking like some sort of archetypal villain. Being caught in his stare would take anyone aback. His expression was one of friendly amusement, but felt rather shallow.

"Speak when spoken to? Something tells me you're a man who doesn't often *ask* for permission to speak." That earned a somewhat charmed smile that reached his eyes.

"It seems you don't ask for permission for a lot of things, Will. Given our last encounter."

"Hm. I don't recall being the first one to enter. Well-- *break in*. You know what they say about people in glass houses." He *still* had a smile on his face, as if what Will was saying wasn't passive aggressive whatsoever. Will sighed, acquiescing, "You don't look like the kind of person to be here, given the suits. And the Bentley."

"I don't look like many things, I assure you. But you are observant." *Is that patronisation? Or an actual compliment?* Will blinked, "Do you always voice such striking impressions of the people you meet? Perhaps it's a result of an excellent eye for detail. I imagine you find places like this often overwhelming, given how much you see." The incline of his head made it all the more scrutinising and Will almost swallowed his gum. Only the second time seeing each other and this guy wants to play see-through-skin.

His brow furrowed minutely when he opened his mouth to actually answer but found himself saying: "I didn't come here to be assaulted with psychoanalysis. Did I not make it clear the first time that I don't want to know who you are? I don't need a *friend,* and I never asked for your help. If you'll excuse me." He purposefully shoved past him, surprised when he wasn't met with more resistance as he did, half expecting a hand to catch his wrist, or a whispered threat.

Will could've scoffed that a man of his stature and distinct intelligence wouldn't be more aware of the security of his pockets. Certainly given the weight of his pocketbook. When he'd got far enough away, he took a glimpse at the ID: a doctor, no less. That was unsurprising. But for a moment Will thought he recognised the name: *Hannibal Lecter.*

What he *failed* to recognise, was the emptiness of his own back pocket. Right where his own wallet had been.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry, but *came in handy*. I'll see myself out.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> *"I believe you have something of mine." It wasn't a question, and the way he said it didn't sound like it should be accompanied by what could only be described as a smirk.*
>
> *"Ditto."*
>
> Oh dear.

The dogs eagerly sniffed at his hands, and tried to barge through the front door as Will came in. Rain had started to pelt down on his drive home, or rather, he'd driven into the area of the oncoming storm, pitter-pattering, then hammering on the outer shell of the car as he drove, passing blurred street lamps alighting red at dusk. It had always unsettled him how the car headlights reflected in the eyes of crepuscular animals rearing their heads. *Fucking creepy, whatever they were.* The glow of their stares bleeding into the sheets of rain.

At night, sometimes, when he looked out of his window, or went on a stroll with the dogs in the wee hours of the night armed with a flashlight, he'd squint and see sets of eyes appearing in the distance. On the edge of the tree line, motionless, blinking like morse code. He felt *watched*.

When he turned out the day's earnings onto his bed, heavy watches bounced, full wallets plopped down, along with the delicate rings, necklaces, loose cash, and an actual pocket watch that he near-enough laughed at when he realised what it was. *Not bad. Not bad at all.* Winston bounded onto the bed too, briefly checking over his bounty before turning his eyes up to Will, and licking at his fingers when he raised them to scratch behind the dog's ears. With a motion of a hand, he hopped down again, the pack following Will intently to the kitchen as he collected and placed down their food. A click of his tongue sent them all scrambling around and chewing loudly.

Making sure not to step on any paws or tails, Will edged his way past them to go and hang up his jacket. He patted down the back pockets of his khakis and frowned, looking at the bed to find everything but his wallet. He didn't drop it on his desk either. Not on the kitchen counter. Scowling, he checked all the pockets of his jacket, inner ones as well. And found nothing. *Maybe he'd left it in the car? Could it have fallen out in there?*

Once he came back inside, dampened by the rain, he stood in the middle of the room for a long, confused moment. And then it hit him.

Hannibal fucking Lecter had stolen his wallet.

Hannibal fucking Lecter, had indeed, stolen his wallet. *Borrowed* would be a better way to describe it- he had no intentions on keeping it or selling it off. It was merely taken to provide further details, so Will without-a-surname, became Will Graham of Wolf Trap, Virginia; it just so happened that Will had kept a sample of a business card for his repair skills that never went into production, giving Hannibal not only his supposed "real job", but his address, too.

By the time the weekend rolled around, Will had managed to pawn off just about everything from his little trip, to local stores, and his own contact list of back-alley appraisers, and scrupulous collectors who don't name sources. With the hefty profit he earned- it was more than enough- he could've paid for the next three sets of monthly bills! Or the upkeep of at least ten more dogs! One of the wrist watches by itself was a *Jaeger Lecoultre* worth close to eight thousand dollars and Will had nearly choked to death on his own spit when he was told. If his luck always ran that high, retirement here he comes.

Although, instead of going to bed at night feeling secure and no longer stressed by such financial burdens, he struggled to get to sleep at all, too busy thinking and getting angry about what had be stolen from him. By a strange guy he'd aquatinted only a few weeks beforehand, in one of the most memorable meetings he'd had in a long time- among the top five most ridiculous.

He kept wondering if what he was experiencing is how it feels for the people that he steals from, and that perhaps he feels bad enough to not do it again. But then he'd realise that *no*, he didn't, *and it might be some odd form of karma, but let's not get too pedantic, okay? Yeah. Try and forget about it, okay? Don't imagine hunting him down and folding him like a fucking wallet, OKAY?*

Even with a handful of hours of sleep, he got up excruciatingly early in the morning as the pale sun was only just rising, mist clearing to leave dew on the grass, birds hopping by and calling from their perches. They sang louder as he sat back in his waders on a rock in the stream, casting his line out as far as he could. The birdsong was eventually filtered out by the great hissing the winding current provided, and busy constructions of his thoughts.

The dogs were nearby, watching and wandering around on the bank whilst sniffing around the trees. Now and again some of the smallest went to investigate the water and Will had to call over for them to stop. It goes without saying that the company of many dogs felt far better than the company of many people. No worrying about appearances, no uncomfortable need for conversation, no extreme miscommunication causing arguments. No judgment. Very... *refreshing*.

In the space of a little over an hour, until the dogs started getting restless, Will managed to catch two fish of a decent size that he bought back to the house. He left the dogs out on the porch until he put the fish in the freezer, washed his hands, and changed into a sweatshirt and khakis. He then went out to wipe their feet before letting them inside.

Just as he was getting to the last set of paws, something black moving closer in the corner of his eye stopped him, and he stood up, watching with a scowl as a black car approached the house. A familiar black car. A very familiar black *fucking Bentley*.

He let Buster inside and closed the screen door behind him, a heady mix of adrenaline, irritation, and-- *something else?* settling in the pit of his stomach as the dogs started barking. His hunting rifle was a few steps away. For a moment, he still had his hand on the doorknob and genuinely considered going to fetch it, but as soon as Hannibal stepped out of the car and had the gall to *smile* at him, he stopped. Sighing heavily, glaring as he watched him walk up to the porch like he owned the house. A three-piece suit, yet again. Coat draped over his arm, smug smile on his face.

"I believe you have something of mine." It wasn't a question, and the way he said it didn't sound like it should be accompanied by what could only be described as a smirk.

"Ditto." Will mumbled, not averting his eyes for a second: "It appears we have a stale mate." Hannibal hummed an agreement, amused. After a pause, Will adopted a goading smile of his own, "What if I don't give it to you?" Something in Hannibal's eyes changed, whether he knew it or not.

"I don't want it to come to that, Will."

Will narrowed his eyes and tried not to scoff, "Is that a threat?" Hannibal inclined his head inquisitively, just as cat does.

"It could be." And he said it with such conviction it actually discouraged Will a little bit.

"*Ooh*. What happened to do no harm, *Doctor Lecter?*" Hannibal's eyes lit up, or was it a trick of the light?

"Are you my patient? I didn't think our relationship was, in any sense, professional." Came the smooth reply, looking past him to the source of the varying growls, "Are you going to invite me in?"

"Why would I?"

"It would be the polite thing to do, as the weather is turning cold. I trust that your rudeness is only defensive, and quite rightfully so, but it could be made up by the offering of a warm drink." His accented voice had a cadence to it with the same warmth as a trusted friend, and Will didn't want to trust it for a second but found himself easing up, "It would certainly help our mutual desire for the exchange of stolen goods. If your dogs don't maul me first."

"They only would if asked them to." Will informed, whistling at the dogs to move away before opening the door, "So any funny business, and you're dead." Hannibal liked those odds, so he stepped inside.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Saying he wasn't afraid of him was the truth: it didn't mean Will wasn't wary. It was a smart thing to be.

Let's just say that he overstays his welcome and Will has had enough. (*Maybe?*)

Forget the dogs, Hannibal, beware the man.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Does my presence here offend you, Will?"

"Yes." Will was unabashed in his sincerity, turning his back and closing a few drawers, hiding certain things from view, "But I'm not afraid of you."

To see him in his house, *his territory*, was fascinating. If Hannibal changed his mind about him and wanted to kill him, he had kept the shoddy business card in his Rolodex. Just in case. He imagined doing it in that moment: letting his pack of strays starve until they feasted upon the festering body of their dead master, blood and flesh between their teeth, primordial once again. It would have poetic irony; cut off and consume the hand that feeds. It would be beautiful to behold, "A bold statement." Hannibal answered, watching and waiting, both hands hidden under his coat. When nothing more was said, Will glanced to him as he tidied away an ashtray.

"Why? Do I need to be?" Will thought of his rifle again, and narrowed his eyes imperceptibly as Hannibal considered him.

"Corvus oculum corvi non eruit." Hannibal offered, causing Will's brow to furrow, "A crow will not pick out the eye of another crow."

"You already know what I am-- what I do." Will noticed that the dogs weren't keen on the new man before them, shyer than normal, meeker in their gaits. He turned back to face him to give him his full attention, and imagined the expression on Hannibal's face if a gun was pointed at him, right then and there, in that minute. It didn't change much. Will sighed, "We are both *crows*, then? If we want to use metaphors."

Hannibal looked amused again, evident only in the twitch of the corner of his mouth, and mean glint to his eye, "What do you think I mean?" Will wasn't going to start playing a

fucking guessing game. He probably meant *criminal*, too broad of a term to dissect: too careful to divulge too much. It wasn't as if he would admit to something like mass murder outright- and even if he did, Will's self preservation would come in between himself and the cops. His admissions were omissions; expertly judged.

"I think you mean that you being here won't result in violence. Not initiated by you, anyway." He half-shrugged, sounding as inattentive as he would if Hannibal wasn't standing in his front room, "Coffee?"

Will didn't let Hannibal escape from his peripherals as he went to the kitchen to make them both the warm drink he'd alluded to so unsubtly, Hannibal following without hurry. Saying he wasn't afraid of him was the truth: it didn't mean Will wasn't wary. It was a smart thing to be.

This man, looking as poised as he did, was a complete intruder into Will's space. And his house always felt like entirely *his space*, holding everything he is in a kind of ether, like a sensual fish tank- all continuous colours, handmade fishing tackle, the details and curiosities solely personal to him. Hannibal being there felt *wrong* in too many ways, but did provide a jarring contrast- the inscrutable man was a puzzle of contradictions, and he was aesthetically as different to Will as night is to day. But only on the surface.

Still, Will didn't want him there. What he wanted was his wallet back.

At least... *he thought so?*

As it turned out, despite his knack for circumstantial meetings that were beginning to teeter on the edge of suspicious- *maybe stalking? At a push?*- Hannibal had piqued Will's interest. His looks, admittedly, might've played their part (and the fact that Will hadn't engaged in that much one-to-one human interaction, that wasn't phatic or transactiona*l in over a year*) but he found himself taking the bait he was so obviously being thrown. It seemingly worked both ways, too. That didn't mean Hannibal didn't get on his fucking nerves. *By God, does he pry- the doctor in him, no doubt. The expensive suits? The paisley ties? The car? Christ almighty. Don't even try it.* Even so, Will remained uncertain about whether or not he wanted this man anywhere near him, let alone engage in a friendly relations.

Hannibal took the mug of coffee Will gave him, and didn't react when Will slipped past him to go back into the main room. After a pause, he followed suit: "Is it natural for you to dismiss people so quickly?"

"Do you always ask so many questions?"

Hannibal placed his coat on the back of an armchair and Will tried not to comment, "I'm simply trying to figure out where I stand."

Will spoke over the rim of his cup, "You're standing in my house, against my better judgement." With how rude he was being in that moment, Hannibal mused that it was lucky that he was pretty. For both their sakes: "Apart from your wallet, there must be something else you want. It's a bit fishy that I've met you three times in the space of a month, don't you think?"

"Not used to familiar faces?" Another way of saying *you have no friends?*

"I have my dogs. I don't need other people." Will sat down on the edge of the bed, and scratched Winston's cheek when he padded over to check on him, like he was agreeing.

"Strangely enough, your isolation doesn't seem to make you vulnerable, as it would others." He drank his coffee and gestured to the chair, "Can I sit?"

No. "Sure." Will bit out, far from appreciative of the therapeutic tone to his voice, and wanting nothing more than to punch the curious look off his face, "I'm not isolated." He sounded as if he was trying to convince himself. Hannibal looked at him: no pity, only genuine intrigue. Will fidgeted.

"Social exclusion can be used as a highly effective deterrent of bad behaviour. You don't follow that correlation, Will." Hannibal folded his hands in his lap the same as he would if he was in a goddamned therapy session, watching the man before him watch him, like two mirrors reflecting back on each other, "It's arguable that your status of a social recluse is your own decision."

Will was quiet for a long moment: "*Bad behaviour?* You say it like what I do is childish."

"Is it?" *That's it.*

"What the fuck do you want from me?" Hannibal quirked a brow at him, "For me to keep my mouth shut? Is that it?"

"Not everyone has to have ulterior motives to want to befriend you, Will." Will scoffed, "I very much doubt you'd be one to tell tales. What you say to whom is no concern of mine; very few people would take your word for such accusations." Hannibal adjusted the line of his throat, drawing attention, "*Crows* are notoriously untrustworthy creatures."

Will smiled, emboldened: "*Huh*. Who's to say you weren't there making a late night house call to one of your patients? In fact, who's to say we were even there at all? As far as anyone else knows, we were tucked up asleep in our beds."

"Of course." Hannibal's smile resurfaced slightly but his gaze hardened, almost claustrophobically, "Don't you want to know why I was there?"

"No." Well, *he did.* But ignorance is bliss, as they say. Besides, the way Hannibal was looking at him was starting to make him feel itchy, "Y'know what--" He dug out Hannibal's wallet from his bedside drawer and held it up to him before throwing it to the end of the bed: "*Here*. Don't look so surprised that I haven't sold it. Call it the kindness of my heart."

Hannibal smiled wider at the uneasy, begrudged look Will gave him as he got up and walked over to fetch it. Once he had, he took Will's wallet from his back pocket and dropped it down in its place: "I must say, it's a pleasure doing business with you, Mr. Graham."

He tried not to grimace, "Likewise." When Hannibal moved away and grabbed his coat Will breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed it was Hannibal's turn to leave for once. They said their

goodbyes, and Hannibal levelled Will's gaze for an extended moment from the driver's seat with his face covered by the reflection of the sky, considering, before driving away.

In spite of how unwelcome the visit had been, Will caught a part of himself pondering the possibility of what would become of some species of relationship with Hannibal Lecter. Obscure and ambiguously dark- rooted in caution. Instinct told him *nothing good.* Or, perhaps nothing at all, and it would turn out to be a waste of his time. *It couldn't hurt to find out. Right?*

Chapter End Notes

Oh, but it could hurt, Will. Far more than you realise.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

He drove to one of the nicer bars about thirty minutes out.

And the rest ended up as a bit of a blur.

I'm really sorry, Will. But I guess... you're welcome, Hannibal? Sort of?

(If you're reading this around Christmas, consider it my gift to you. You're welcome.)

Will was trying to find his keys- fishing in his pockets, checking under the dog's beds, rooting through the drawers- when he found a crinkled card smushed between a copy of Rhetorica ad Herennium and a bottle of lube. A phone number was written neatly on the back, without context. He turned it around, and it read: Dr. Hannibal Lecter, PhD. *Oh, look, an address. Paying him a visit would be sweet, sweet revenge.* He pocketed it for another time.

As it turns out, one of the dogs had buried his keys under a blanket, but he found them eventually. Sighing, he grabbed his coat, and left the house.

In a shocking twist, his plans going out had nothing to do with another job. He'd simply gone stir-crazy and had to get out of the house properly, sick of drinking alone at night; it was an impulsive decision suddenly made in the late evening (definitely nothing to do with the fact that he'd run out of whiskey). It's not that he wanted to interact with anyone though: oftentimes just being surrounded by others reminded him that-- well, *other people exist.* With their own lives and relationships. People-watching, and all that, only without overanalysing, and empathising, and winding himself up. His perspective needed broadening now and again. Only objectively.

He drove to one of the nicer bars about thirty minutes out.

And the rest ended up as a bit of a blur.

He ended up drinking far more than he should've. The longer the night when on, the more the crowds gathered. All at once, there were too many people there, too many faces, too much noise, and instead of enjoying his time, he figured that the best way to deal with his nervousness was to drink. *Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the stage: a Very Bad Idea.*

When he finally noticed that he'd had one drink too many- realising his mistake- he got out of there. The night air was cold and bitter with fumes and cigarette smoke, his breath almost visible in the glow of the street lamps. It crossed his mind that it was sad the weather was overcast. He wanted to see the stars as he walked. Hell, at least he was aware and smart

enough to know not to drive drunk. So he made the decision to walk to the nearest motel a couple of streets away. Alone. In... the dark?

Actually, maybe that was a bad idea too.

Finally, to top off his nightly limit of three bad ideas, he took a shortcut down an alleyway to avoid the car headlights that were beginning to make his head hurt. He couldn't see much of where he was treading, spare the occasional car whizzing past to light his way. If he was able to smell anything other than bourbon, he would've realised how much it smelt of dog shit, and week old garbage. And the cheap deodorant of a lithe man hiding behind the waste disposal unit.

The hunter becomes the hunted.

Suddenly, Will only heard the rustle of clothes, and the guy hooked an arm around his neck from behind. Inebriated, and taken by surprise, his only initial reaction was grabbing the offending arm, and trying to pull it off him as the grip got tighter. His adrenaline kicked in, sobering him up drastically, and he shoved the man at his back against the wall. Throwing his head back when the grip on his neck loosened- the sickening crunch of the assailant's nose reverberated through his skull as he did- Will darted away, rendered blind until another car came past, and lit up the man's face, now bleeding.

Once blood began flowing, it only got worse. A set of knuckles connected with Will's jaw, only stopping him for a second before he was throwing a punch back, the sound of bone on bone, twice. The man fell back against the wall, and Will began to bleed himself. The taste of blood in his mouth spurred him on, and he had his hand on his knife, until another man tackled him, knocking him to the ground. He was kicked hard in the stomach, then again, and he was sure he heard a rib crack, but before the pain even registered, the man was on top of him.

Will clawed as he kept reaching for his neck, a stray fist catching him in the eye a few times, Will wrestling his hands off of him, legs trapped underneath his weight. Then, within the scuffle, the flicker of a blade, and Will jammed it into the side of the man's neck just as headlights cut into the alley; the blood that poured alighted, flowing, sparkling, a hand coming up in a futile attempt to seal the wound.

Shoving the blubbering, choking stranger off of him, Will quickly dived out of the way of the original attacker, and scrambled up, moving in between shadows. They stood for a moment, facing each other, blood-soaked and breathing hard like two nocturnal predators on the verge of ripping each other apart.

The man moved first, but Will's reflexes moved faster, and any further attempts were shunted by the jab of Will's knife pushed up into his stomach, twisting, then stabbing again. Thick, hot blood, and the dull thud as he hit the floor let Will know when he could stop. He stood over the bodies for a moment, breathless. And he felt everything all at once, the pain numb and blinding and throbbing, and he fell over himself, landing clumsily against the opposite wall.

Groaning, he patted down his coat until he found his phone, and that stupid business card. He read the number with strained, blurred vision, and dialled it, red fingerprints obscured the screen. Will actually smiled at how absurd it all was. The call was answered on the fourth ring, "Hello?"

"There's fucking blood everywhere--" Will bit back a pained noise with a humourless laugh, "I'm in the alley off a street, somewhere by Annandale. It's by the bar-- I don't know the name. Off interstate 495. Come and get me." He heaved, his left eye was swollen shut: "Please." And he hung up.

It was by sheer coincidence that Hannibal was only a brief drive away, at an after party nearby Rockville that, to anyone on the outside, looked more like a wake. All the discussions of death, and expensive tastes.

He'd spoken at a university to a theatre hall of philosophy students, and likeminded professors of the arts, about eschatology, and evangelical denominations. Largely in relation to the work of Socrates. St. John's exile to Patmos had been one of his main points; the painting by Hieronymus Bosch that he spoke on had caused a reaction in the audience like ripples in a lake- whispers, and stares, and hums. The talk ended with a standing ovation, spare a rare, marred face of jealousy, drawn taut and often scowling.

In any regard, it seemed that he'd made quite the impression.

But, after answering the same, vapid questions, being flirted with by people less than half his age, and groups of teenagers hanging onto his every word, desperately, for *two hours*, Hannibal had started to have enough. His ego can only sate his sensitivity for discourtesy and monotony for so long. Every student so eager to please and treading so carefully, they were practically foaming at the mouths to get a good word in edgeways- any of the professors, or greater minds, had essentially thrown him to the wolves; unwilling to participate in further expansion of their students' minds at such a late hour, after such a long day, making for any chance at an intelligent two-way conversation rather lacking.

Hannibal had started to feel like a dissected rodent stretched wide to be poked and irritated, the wide-eyed pupils all scribbling notes and gawking. *Puerile and overabundant with humility. Maybe even piteous.*

One sip of the inexpensive wine, and he declined the offer of anymore drinks, but the canapés were nice enough. To be frank, it was probably the saving grace of the post-event event.

Will's call, as disturbing as it was, proved convenient. Just-- *obviously not for Will.*

Hannibal weighed up his options once the line went dead. He figured that it would be far more interesting than sustaining another hour or so being hounded by such pretentious individuals, much preferring the company of a violent thief with a tendency to do and say things that he'd kill a lesser man for. That said something about the party. *Or something about him. How curious.*

At the fourth bar he'd driven past, Hannibal finally recognised Will's car. He parked up next to it, and breathed in the air deeply when he stepped out. The scent of blood stood behind the

haze of tobacco smoke, and alcohol, and gasoline. So, he followed it.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

By the disfigurement of their faces, the fight was swift and severe. Hannibal stepped over one of the dead men and bent down to check Will's vitals.

Will is dead. Jk. But he might be.

The last time Hannibal had walked in on a murder scene created by someone else's hand, it had been one that, admittedly, he had a share of responsibility for. But the scene that he came upon was worlds away from a woman in shock, and an inhaled tongue.

Light from Will's phone absolved what little he could make out, making the pooled blood on the pavement glisten the same as it would in the light of the moon. It outlined the shapes of two bodies lying clumsily around Will, welted and cooling. The stench of blood was cloying in the air; mostly soaked up by the fabrics of their clothes. By the disfigurement of their faces, the fight was swift and severe. Hannibal stepped over one of the dead men and bent down to check Will's vitals.

As soon as he touched his fingers to the hot skin of Will's neck, Will let out a fragile noise, a strained sort of whine, and his right eye rolled open. He grabbed Hannibal's wrist weakly, trying to clarify that he wasn't having hallucinations from going fucking delusional from blood loss and head trauma. He felt like his face was six inches away from his skull: "Will. *Will*," Hannibal tried, the odd white-blue lighting making his bruised, bleeding face form into a horrifying spectre in the dark: "Did you kill these two men?"

Will groaned, and if Hannibal's not mistaken, *he rolled his one good eye,* "Obviously." He was still holding Hannibal's wrist even though he was no longer touching him, "I don't happen upon dead bodies- very often. Or fall flat on my face. I figured, uh, you're a doctor, or whatever, so... do me a favour and make this *better*. I don't know-- Please?" It's not like there's anyone else to fall back on. His speech was quiet and tinged with pain, his brow furrowed, and even his non-swollen eye was heavy-lidded.

"Where does it hurt, Will?"

Will stuttered an inhale then made another agonised noise, almost certain they'd kicked in his ribcage. He spoke through the blood between his teeth, "Everywhere."

"Can you walk?" Will looked dozily past him, unfocused, expression turning slack-jawed and thoughtful. Unblinking.

"...Hannibal?"

"Yes?"

"I think I'm going to pass out." And he did.

Once Hannibal was sure Will wouldn't bleed out, and checked over his wounds, he pulled him to his feet and carried him to his car in the same way he would if Will was so drunk he needed help walking. He returned to the scene and worked quickly in tying and bagging up the bodies with garbage bags, and other supplies he kept in his car (y'know, in case of murder-y thoughts) and lifted them into the dumpster. They were to be collected the following morning.

He took out his pocket square, picked up and wiped down Will's phone before pocketing it, then used it to collect and wrap up the knife, flicking the blade shut and slipping it into his coat. How the orange-yellow tint of the pairs of occasional headlights sparkled off the blood and stone made the two merge together, painting the startling red a deep yellow-toned maroon, velvety and undisturbed. The incoming rain would wash the pavement, ruining the effect but leaving little trace of it ever having been there, and if not, most people would assume a drunken fight had taken place.

Even if anyone did find the bodies, they would find nothing else.

On the drive back to Hannibal's house, Will didn't stir; the low grumble of the engine acted as a lullaby. Hannibal took the opportunity to snap Will's cheap phone in half, and throw it from the car into a line of trees. He pondered that maybe if Will asked nicely enough, he would pay for new one for him. *Would that be overzealous? Was saving his life not enough? Willingness to spend money and care and time on someone who stole from you would be foolish, would it not?*

Then, he pondered that he didn't care.

When Will finally awoke, he was-- *naked!* Oh, no, only on the top half. It didn't surprise him that he couldn't so much as squint with his left eye. *Half-blind and half-naked.* In... a bed that isn't his. And a house that isn't his either. *Oh, yeah, this is brilliant*. His wounds only ached, residual pain still cutting through now and again, sharp, like the edge of a knife. He lifted his head to look down at the bruises blossoming vividly along the length of his torso, and found that his hands were wrapped in bandages when he went to touch his ribs, and wait- *an IV in his arm? Yeah. Fucking brilliant.* His head dropped back onto the pillow, and he shut his eyes to stop the room swaying and shifting in and out of focus.

It's not like he could be angry. He wasn't about to rip the needle from his arm and make an escape through the open window- *he had asked for help,* and needed the painkillers far more than he realised. By God, was it making him tired. Realistically, he wouldn't make it out of the room, let alone out of the building. It felt like his brain was floating out at sea.

But his head had always been like a shitty boat filled with heavy cargo- lead, or barrels of rum, or something- and when it tips to one side he can't help stopping it. Tipping one way or the other. He can feel it slipping. Like he felt it slipping whilst wielding a knife to flesh, breached by the want for violence and taste of blood. Call it impulsiveness, call it stupidity, call it an illness, it made little difference.

His mind drifts on a blackened ocean at night, and if the waves rise and twist, it takes on water all of the sudden. And sometimes he feels himself drowning, and sometimes he doesn't. In those nightmares, he doesn't know if he's alive.

Sleep didn't take hold of him long enough to submerge himself in one, and he was woken up by Hannibal coming into the room.

Instead of looking at the man, Will took a moment to actually take in his surroundings. His vision was bleary and frustratingly limited, but the room looked like a guest room for royalty- a small bookcase topped with ornaments of a horse's head statue, and an antique vase that was probably far above Will's price range; an ensuite bathroom accented with golds; a triptych of paintings of silvers and blues by Utagawa Yoshiiku lining the opposite wall. Even the wood of the furniture looked expensive. There was a sheepskin rug surrounding the bed that he couldn't yet see, but he'd probably laugh at later on. The room was painted blue, to match Hannibal's own.

The man himself, checked Will's IV before sitting next to the bed in an armchair on Will's good side, "Good afternoon, Will. How are you feeling?" The tone of voice reminded Will that Hannibal was a doctor. Weird.

"Fucking shit." Hannibal didn't exactly flinch at the profanity, but his brow raised slightly, kind of like when an animal hears a loud noise and looks towards it. He wrote something down in the journal on his lap.

"Eloquently put."

Will huffed, sarcasm coming out again, "So. Am I going to make it? Because if not, you'll need to look after my dogs. But they don't like you. They'll get very upset without me, so you'll need to find them someone." That made Hannibal smile.

"You're doubting my abilities as a doctor to be able to help you heal, Will."

"Did they break my fucking ribs?"

"No, fortunately for you, they didn't break your fucking ribs." It was strange to hear him swear even if he was mimicking, and Will wanted to laugh: "They are bruised, though, so they will take some time to heal. You've probably noticed your black eye- you're very lucky you didn't fracture your skull as well."

Will looked away, "Hm. I don't feel lucky."

"I'd say you came out of it fairing substantially better than the other two." As in, not dead. Yet.

"Comforting."

"Bruised ribs can take two to four weeks to heal. After that, you should be back to full health." He explained, looking down to Will's bandaged knuckles, "So long as you remain active, and don't plan or engage in things that will injure yourself further."

"You really are an unrelenting fountain of encouragement."

Hannibal levelled his gaze, humorously, then: "Thank you."

"No. Thank *you*. I'd probably still be there otherwise. Or jailed. Or *dead*." Will offered, unsure of what else to say, unsure whether to trust him so much.

"There's no need to thank me, Will, you asked for my help. I'm in no position to deny you that- given my duty as a doctor." He rose from his seat, and closed his journal, "Do no harm, remember?" *Yeah, right.* Will's only response was to swallow down a smile, and try not roll his eyes as he walked away to fetch a meal that Will didn't understand the name of. It seemed they were going to be forced to see a lot more of each other. For better or for worse.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

> *He'd begun to feel like a stray in his own head: unsure of where he wanted to be, and wandering further and further away from himself.*
>
> Will goes mad.

Huh. So, um, a few weeks into being treated, and medicated, and somewhat coddled, Will had ended up wanting to bash his *own* ribcage in. *Who knew being cared for could be so fucking exhausting.*

It had taken him a while to allow Hannibal to help him up, or get into his personal space for anything. But about three days in, he refused when Hannibal had offered to aid him in getting out of bed to pee. He'd been told it was a bad idea, but y'know, his expertise is bad ideas, apparently. In quite a childish move, he hit Hannibal's hands further away when he held onto the bedside table, quietly struggling to work past the white hot pain that was pooling in his chest.

Perhaps it was less to do with his willpower and more to do with his pride, but he moved to walk properly, and as soon as he did he lost his footing on the rug and collapsed. Hannibal caught him- much to his fury- and simply acted as a human crutch. Surprisingly enough, he hadn't made a comment akin to an I-told-you-so either. Will hadn't refused much help since.

Within a week he could walk short distances, and he could feed himself just fine, but apart from that, there wasn't a lot to do. He'd been given books and writing utensils, sure, but his attention span was fleeting and completely entrapped in the one room he had the ability to occupy.

By the second week, he found himself rather bored. By the third, he'd had enough, thank you very much.

The lack of constant company, canine or human, hadn't helped much. It had made him spit a laugh that Hannibal actually trusted him enough to leave him *alone*, in *his* house, *to go to work for the entire day*. ("I think you need to get yourself a check up from the neck up, Hannibal, if you're letting a thief loose in your house. Trust me that much, do you?") Then he supposed that it's not exactly like he was in a position to run off with whatever he liked the look of. The man knew where he lived, for fuck's sake.

Honestly, when he found that he was starting to smell like Hannibal (not that he'd noticed what Hannibal smelt like or anything) Will had started to feel unsettled. It was too intimate, too uncomfortable, and too enjoyable all at the same time. And he'd begun to feel like a stray

in his own head: unsure of where he wanted to be, and wandering further and further away from himself.

He missed his dogs terribly. He missed fishing, and smoking, and fixing fucking engines. He missed the sight of his house in the distance at night, like a boat on the sea; when he thought of it the ground moved and swelled, the lights blinked, and the building itself shifted, as if unmoored.

Was it starting to feel unfamiliar? Hang on-- was he the one with separation anxiety from his dogs, instead of the other way around? That's fucking sad.

In his dreams, he'd see Hannibal more often than his own face, and mostly through glimmers captured by shaking reflections in water, or cracks of light through the dark. In his nightmares, Hannibal would be present and vivid. And there would be an *overwhelming* amount of physical contact. *Hint-hint*.

It had Will slightly worried about any noises he could be making at night, and if Hannibal would be able to hear. Considering the man was a doctor, it'd be ruled as totally natural and understandable to have a fucking sex dream now and again, but it still felt weird for it to be happening in someone else's house, *with* that someone else. He wasn't sure if he expected that or not. He didn't expect the violence involved.

Needless to say, his subconscious wanted nothing more than to get to know Hannibal biblically-- well, whatever he *could see* of him. Conscious Will was uncertain about it (at least, half the time) but was secretly- albeit sceptically- grateful for everything Hannibal had done for him. In turn, he tried to be more wary of his manners and patience than he otherwise would be. Emphasis on *tried*.

One late night, Hannibal came up to check on Will in the middle of preparing dinner, and he wasn't there. He could smell smoke, but it wasn't from the meal he was cooking: "Will?" He checked the bathroom, and even the walk-in wardrobe, and nothing had changed. The window was wide open, the curtains caught in a breeze, dancing; Hannibal approached it, looking down, before a wisp of grey smoke drifted past. His eyes caught Will's, reflecting the red glow of the cigarette between his lips, jaw shifting as he inhaled. He was sitting on the walkway above the front door wearing a bed shirt and slacks, swinging his legs.

"Hello." There was smoke on his breath as he spoke, curling and flitting in the night air, "I didn't throw myself out of the window, if that's what you feared."

"It would've been a mess to clean up." That made Will smile around the next drag, squinting at how Hannibal's skin shined in the pallid light of the street: "What possessed you to climb the front wall of my house at this hour?"

Will's expression changed with the raise his eyebrows, comical and patronising, "*Well*. Today I decided to go *insane*."

"Decided?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"That pain medication you've been feeding me could have something to do with it. I had a dream where I was talking to a-- feathered deer in the dark while sitting above it in a tree." Will waited for a car to go past before speaking again, "I woke up unaware of what year it was, and sick to death of those same four walls, so here I am."

"Is this a replication of that dream?"

A smile cracked Will's face in two, "Maybe. It did sound like you- the deer." He pulled the cigarette from his lips and exhaled, "Or that was... another dream."

"Can I ask where you got that?"

Will picked up the packet from behind his thigh, wiggling it in the air, "You didn't check all my pockets when you got my clothes for me." He put it back down, "Amateur."

"As good as you are with checking people's pockets, you're not that good at taking medical advice, Will--"

"I'll take the compliment. You really like saying my name, don't you?"

Hannibal ignored that, "Specifically advice given by me."

Will shrugged, "Well, you'd be able to *smell* if I had lung cancer, or something, right?" Yeah, Hannibal had explained his whole acute sense of smell like some kind of gift from God, and first Will thought it was a dumb joke, then he thought it was gross, before deciding that it was actually pretty neat. If quite creepy, "I'm in good hands."

"I suppose." Hannibal mused, leaning against the window frame, "But don't leave it up to my good hands if you exert yourself getting back in through the window." Will glanced down.

"Hmm. If I jumped from here, would I break my shins?"

"Possibly."

"Would you carry me back inside if I did?" Will tapped the ash away and turned to him, finding him amused. And... intense. Not like how he always was- perhaps the night air bought it out in him- it was something crimson in his eyes. Something frightening.

"If you asked me to."

"And what would you do if I asked you to kiss me?"

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

"I can't decide if you comparing me to a hunk of meat is a good thing, Hannibal."

In today's episode of: Flirting Goes Too Far.

"I would politely decline." Will practically choked on his cigarette smoke. Fuck. *Fuck. Did he just--* "Because if that happened right now, I'm afraid our dinner would burn."

...Oh. Will smiled around a sigh; a coquettish, proud grin hung itself beautifully across his features in the semi-dark: "I don't think there's any *polite* way to decline *anything*." He stubbed out the cigarette on the stone beside him and flicked it away. Hannibal watched it go with expertly-veiled disgust, "And there's no need to act like you care about a piece of venison more than me."

"I care about many things, Will. There's no doubt that you count yourself among them." Hannibal agreed, partly, warming his hands in his pockets, "But the risk of starting a fire in my kitchen certainly outweighs my want to kiss you, at present."

"But you *do* have a want to kiss me." Will didn't look at him. The look he would've given him if he had been was just as coy as it was alluring. It wasn't voiced in desperation, or questioning- it was a true statement. Hannibal wasn't about to deny it.

"Yes." Hannibal admitted, after a long moment. It made Will smile privately to himself again out of view, "Though, not now. This venison dish took too long to prepare."

Will hummed, "I can't decide if you comparing me to a hunk of meat is a good thing, Hannibal." He sent him a look that felt suspicious, trying to figure him out and inwardly laughing at him at the same time. The presence of his name in Will's mouth was rare enough. Hannibal met his gaze fearlessly, barely smiling, without another word.

"It depends how it's interpreted." It surprised even himself that he didn't feel the need to bridle himself around Will, to try to gain a better impression- to save face; they didn't understand each other, but they felt whatever moved between them, lurid and prowling, too cold to touch. Or too warm, "Come back inside. Our meal will be ready soon." He stepped back from the window slightly with this almost predatory look to his eyes, and Will thought it was like watching someone try to persuade a cat to approach them.

So he did what any cat would do: jumped off the building.

And landed on his feet.

Hannibal didn't show it in any capacity on the outside, but for a few terrifying moments, he would've happily let the venison burn. His sudden grip on the window ledge relinquished when Will reappeared and smiled up at him. *Gotcha*. He was, naturally, far too pleased with himself, "Look! No broken bones!" Before Hannibal could return fire, he spoke again: "Aren't you gonna invite me in?"

Nonchalant, Hannibal stepped back and closed the window.

After he'd been let back inside with a quip from Hannibal about wishing he'd fell from a higher place, and a small, unashamedly flirtatious dialogue wherein Hannibal acted as if Will had indecently turned up to dinner in his bedclothes, Will was led past the kitchen and into the dining room. He'd hardly been downstairs- only once within the past few days into a lounge area, finding a harp, a taxidermy stag head, and the fireplace he decided to light, and almost fall asleep in front of; he would've done, if Hannibal hadn't startled him when he came back into the house and silently snuck up behind him, frightening him so suddenly that he almost fell off the couch. They ate dinner on the couch there, surprising, considering Hannibal's supposed want for courtesy, and gone to their individual bedrooms shortly after.

If they had enjoyed their food in the dining room, Will would've laughed quietly to himself as he did when he entered, taken aback by it all. *Why am I not surprised?* The living wall, aromas of herbs, colour of the blue night sky with the textures of the wood, the innate elegance of the table itself, the morose shine to the horns on the mantle.

Without any overtly rude comments, he sat down, and received his plate of food with thanks. It smelt glorious, and tasted glorious, too. Since he'd become used to Hannibal's cooking over the weeks of eating it, he stopped with the compliments pretty early on. Didn't mean he didn't already *know* it was fucking phenomenal. No one needed to tell him that.

The conversation between Will's greedy mouthfuls was mainly consisting of Hannibal asking questions. Asking if the pain he was experiencing was worsening, about what he'd done that day that didn't consist of smoking and disrespecting property. He never once asked if Will wanted to leave yet- the answer was blatant enough. Especially with the food being so wonderful. His dogs were the only thing making him pine. It would be stupid to ask Hannibal to bring them to him, *surely?*

Every time they spoke, though, Hannibal tried to glean answers about Will's childhood, and thought patterns, and generally wanted to find a way to break into the chamber of Will's skull. He allowed him pieces of information to sate him; not disclosing all things ugly that flashed into his mind like sunlight catching itself on cut glass. He resisted the peculiar urge to smile when he did so.

Halfway through the meal, abruptly, there was a knock at the door. Will looked to Hannibal, quirking a brow when they both stopped talking to listen to the rapping of knuckles again. As Hannibal stood elegantly and moved to answer it, Will's only help was: "Is this when I find out it isn't your house?" He thought he heard the exhale of a light laugh from Hannibal as he exited the room.

Will was happy to sit and eat, quickly finishing off the last few forkfuls of meat before his curiosity got the better of him.

Being a thief, it wasn't hard to stay out of sight. What made it difficult, was that he could hear a woman speaking to Hannibal but couldn't see her. She was standing outside, as Hannibal had neglected to let her in, so the front door blocked Will's view to her. *And her view to him*. He couldn't put his finger on how Hannibal's desire for privacy made him feel- *protected, maybe. He did strike me as a possessive type. Does he want possession? A well-kept secret?* He didn't know if that was a good thing.

Whatever the case, he toyed with the idea of walking past the door so she saw him dressed for bed, and watch Hannibal's reaction. Or walk up to him and grab his waist from behind, act sleepy, ask him to come back to bed. Then, innocently recognise their shared company, and see how either party wiggled their way out of the situation. Surprise, and perhaps deter, whoever he was talking to. Just to see a visceral reaction; try to provoke him. Would he even *be* provoked? *The man has the responses of someone with the most unparalleled control in the history of the Galaxy. It's-- psychopathic.*

Commendable, would be a better word.

Sensing his presence, a cursory glance was shot in his general direction, something like anticipation, before Hannibal tilted head at the person he was talking to, ignoring him again. *Well, I never*. He figured he'd go for something in between subtle and upstaging, just shy of mortally embarrassing. For now.

From the kitchen, he raised his voice: "Hannibal! Babe! Who's at the door?"

That interrupted the conversation, alright. It was harder to read Hannibal's expression from this angle, but he certainly didn't panic; his reaction was something he didn't want seen. When the woman at the door spoke up again, implying cheekily that someone else wanted his company, Hannibal said something about *a dinner guest,* and mentioned the word impatient. Although he didn't shy away from the obvious implications of *babe*, and any innuendos that could be crafted, he did sound apologetic. It was enough to satisfy Will.

After Hannibal made vague arrangements to speak at a different time, he returned a smile, saying his goodbyes. And closed the door. As soon as he did so, Will silently scrambled to jump back into his seat at the table, setting his cutlery onto the plate to give the pretence that he was there all along, and definitely not snooping. He didn't think that Hannibal could smell the dissipating adrenaline on him.

But when Hannibal came sat back down at the table with the composure of a trained assassin, and this *look*, Will's adrenaline kicked back in.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

> *Hannibal had become entirely unpredictable in the space of one glance; not that he was particularly predictable to begin with.*
>
> Will should be able to wriggle his way out of this one... right?

Chapter Notes

> Sorry this took so long to update. I know where this is going now (I can't promise it will be what you expect), and dear god, is it difficult to write. Enjoy!

Before his eyes, the warning, black-eyed look placated, like watching a windscreen wiper cut through snow. It actually *terrified* him. When Hannibal lowered his gaze to continue eating, as calm as ever, Will had to internally question whether he'd pissed himself or not. The twisting of his stomach alone made him want to be safe in the company of his pack once again, in his own territory, able to defend himself.

Hannibal had become entirely unpredictable in the space of one glance; not that he was particularly predictable to begin with. Before, Hannibal had reacted with a disapproving glance, or soft sigh he didn't think Will would notice, if he'd had made a lewd comment in front of him. Honestly, they hadn't had all that many non-medicinal interactions in the month Will had occupied space in his house- not as many as Will had expected. Conversations had been sparring and padded with metaphors and difficult to avoid entirely, but not overtly aggressive. Never involved any *unfettered* hostility.

It made Will wonder what would've happened if he'd done anything more dramatic than he did. If he would've been leaving Hannibal's house anytime soon. In a body bag. A lump formed in his throat.

Will let the dust settle, as it were, before picking up his wine glass, casually asking: "Who *was* at the door?" Hannibal didn't exactly sigh, but it seemed like he wanted to.

"A colleague." ...*Okay?* Will felt himself visibly shrink at the sudden lack of disclosure, taking a long drink. Instinct was strangely rousing in his gut, telling him to get out. *Now*. The wine sedated it, a little.

Will hummed an answer and narrowed his eyes at him, knowing he was purposefully trying to avoid them. The sudden shift that had radiated into the very air between them was worrying at best. Will found himself on edge- preparing for-- *something*- just as he was when they first met. Did he have anything to truly be afraid of? Sure, Hannibal had told him that he had been an ER surgeon, but had quit after too many bodies dropped. That he felt *like he'd killed them*- as if it was all his fault. Will had found the choice of words odd; even stranger, considering Will's own experiences with almost (and *almost* is a very liberal way of putting it, it was more of a case of *being a hairsbreadth away from*) killing strangers, either to save himself, or marked down to the sadistic high of everything getting to the more volatile side of him, and how he hadn't found the responsibility crippling in any way. If anything, he'd found it thrilling.

He'd only compared the two because of the detachment you have to bestow in order to be a surgeon, or a thief- not only is it practical, but it's *essential*. Granted, one of them is about sustaining other people's lives, and the other focused on sustaining your own whilst marginally inconveniencing other's, but the sentiment is the same. Given the lifestyle he led, Will found it weird that Hannibal gave enough of a shit to help those he didn't care about. Feeling lingering and debilitating shame wouldn't account for his switch into the higher stakes of psychiatry- less *hands-on* but equally dangerous when it came to patient death, and arguably more complicated.

It was surprising Hannibal had tolerated him for so long- but perhaps it boiled down to the simple fact that he liked him. He didn't want to think about how he could treat someone he didn't like. Maybe he would've left Will to bleed out in the alley, all because he didn't want to kiss him.

Will was sceptical that Hannibal felt guilt about anything, let alone other people's suffering.

"Is a strange man in your house late at night calling you *babe* in front of your colleague going to tarnish your thriving career, Doctor?"

Hannibal met his eyes again, placing his cutlery neatly on his plate. The dark look hadn't returned, but he certainly wasn't all there- he looked ominously deep in thought, "I don't believe so. I've been subjected to worse, in this life."

When he stood up, Will almost flinched. He half expected to be stabbed in the neck with a blunt knife and left to die. *He'd know where to cut, too.* But he relaxed when Hannibal took the plates, leaving the room. Into the kitchen.

Where the *sharp* knives were.

The back doors were so close, and he could've left, but sat there worrying his bottom lip between his teeth instead. Maybe it's a bad idea to try to mortify and antagonise someone who has intimate, specialised knowledge of how to kill you. *Trust Hannibal to not take embarrassment like a normal person, because guess what? He isn't fucking normal! How would a spoon hold up against a kitchen knife?* After a few drawn out moments, Will got up and followed him- without the spoon. He found Hannibal halfway through pitting and cutting ripe apricots into near translucent slices. He didn't raise his head when Will entered the room: "Did I-- ruin this?"

"This?" Hannibal offered, still not looking at him.

Us. "The meal? The evening? I didn't mean what I said to offend you." He didn't sound remotely sheepish or apologetic, though, just mildly concerned. Matter-of-fact.

"What makes you think it's offended me, Will?"

"You're angry." He looked *surprised?*-- no, curious, when he held Will in his gaze this time. Impressed. It could've been Will's imagination, but a smile appeared to quirk at the corner of his mouth.

"You are not frightened by anger, as I recall. Far from it. Your own anger galvanises you, Will- it can transform to violence, but won't, as long as we don't let it define us." He moved to one of the ovens and took something out, smelling freshly baked and inviting, "Are you presuming my irritation warrants action?"

"I don't know."

"Would you like it to?"

Will frowned a little, studying the knife rack turned away from him instead of Hannibal's sculpted face, "I find it hard to presume anything about you."

"I'm not going to hurt you, Will. Dessert is ready." He said it as if that was the only reason he wouldn't. Hannibal still had the knife in his hand, using it to cut perfect pieces of some kind of pie dish and plate them, putting the blade down to add some extra apricot slices and cream beside it.

He handed Will his plate, and he took it, hardly letting his eyes divert from the man in front of him, "It smells great. What is it?"

"Apricot flaugnarde with a quenelle of vanilla clotted cream. Please, go and sit back down." Without being armed with a potential weapon, and all signs of hostility removed from his expression and voice, Will found it hard to understand how he'd been so scared by him. He turned his back to him as they went to sit back at the table.

"Would you like it to?"

The thought ignored any plea for it to leave, even as Will tried and failed to focus on the food in front of him.

He normally wasn't a number one fan of apricots, but somehow Hannibal managed to get him to like a lot of things more than he previously thought he didn't. Like, I don't know-- *men*. That wasn't as big of an issue as he would've thought it would be; he'd never entirely closed off the possibility. Sure, he'd dabbled: had a handjob in a shower that one time. (Or... *four* separate times? Other stuff too?) Hell, this is coming from a man who feeds on opportunism. Christ knows why it would come as a shock.

Besides, there were more pressing matters to deal with, like if he was going to have to crawl out of the house in a worse state than he'd arrived there in, all those weeks ago. Or figuring

out if 'action' solely means physical harm, or even a good kind of physical harm, and if so-- weigh up his chances? And wondering what the *fuck* Hannibal even meant by the question.

Will didn't exactly come to a decision until afterwards, when Hannibal was standing shoulder-to-shoulder with him while he washed the plates, as he had offered to dry them. It was nice; the intimacy being in each other's space. It made him feel more than he'd expected to. Then, without cogent thought, he found himself saying: "Can you take me back home tonight?" A pause.

"Of course." If Hannibal was surprised, he should've told his face. His movements didn't stutter as he handed Will another glass, "Has something sparked this decision?" Will was well aware of how it looked: he'd embarrassed Hannibal, Hannibal had scared him by getting (very mildly) angry, and he wanted to get out while he still can.

That wasn't the case. He just couldn't let Hannibal know that.

"No. I guess if I'm well enough to jump from a rooftop, I'm well enough to see my dogs again. I miss them." *Dreadfully*. Will half-shrugged, setting the glass down on the side. Hannibal's eyes moved like he was processing the change of events.

He wasn't thinking about that at all. Burning, slippery images of Will's neck dissected were clicking along somewhere in the back of his mind like film reel projections. Imagining the callous smell of his blood humid in the air of the kitchen. The juvenile comment in front of Alana hadn't really bought any of it to head- it had been a possibility from the moment Will had woken up from the drugs and decided to stay. He was aware that he could've done anything to him, at any moment. He didn't really know himself if it was his original intention to keep Will like a caged, wounded animal for causing such disruption in his life, and dispose of him as one, as soon as the novelty wore off. But it hadn't worn off. In the slightest.

As much as he'd contended with his want to examine Will's enamouring brain, turn it over in his hands, he'd found the body and person that held it to be just as fascinating. It was ridiculously ill-timed; made worse by having been in love with him from the night they met.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

As soon as the key was placed in Will's palm, he was up on the porch, hearing the whines and barks and clawing already.

Will and his dogs are reunited! What happens on Will's porch? Surprises for Hannibal! A short epistolary romance ensues! How cute! What could possibly go wrong?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The drive back to his house was too quiet. Will had shoved any of the clothes he particularly liked into the same duffle they'd been bought to him in- and yes, Hannibal had bought a bag of his own clothes to him unprompted- tossing it in the back of the car when he climbed in. (It may have included a cashmere sweater that he wanted to... *borrow?*) He'd changed from his pyjamas into some loose jeans and dark grey sweatshirt, but still muffled a small chuckle with his hand at how disgracefully out of place he looked in the shiny leather and modernity of a Bentley. Not to mention, the man next to him was wearing a suit that probably cost more than all of his dogs combined.

His dogs, holy fuck, he couldn't wait to get back to them. It almost made him giddy to imagine how excited they'd get on his arrival, having only had the everyday stop-in from Hannibal to care for their basic needs. *Did he smell too much like Hannibal now?* The smell of the car would undoubtably be detectable on him- it reminded him of the leather-and-cigar tinged aroma of old money, like finding crumpled notes down the back of his couch. Or a nook of Mayfair-esque gentlemen’s club he'd seen in old James Bond films as a child. He wondered what the dogs would make of his scent, and if they'd make assumptions. If dogs can even make assumptions.

Alone, Will would drive with the radio on to cut out the silence that made space for the noise of his own mind, but, weirdly, he didn't mind the lack of music with Hannibal there. It didn't make him uncomfortable. Neither felt the need to say anything. Instead, Will just listened to the purring of the engine and the shushing of the road under tyre. Watching the occasional car shoot past, blurs of nocturnal people, and ghostly smears of trees, leaves reflecting yellow in the headlights. The closer they got, the more visibly excited he could feel himself getting- restless and twitchy.

He mused that he could fall asleep, even in Hannibal's close company. Hannibal was silently hoping he would: he could use the rest. After all, judging by the *noises* from his room at night, Will wasn't doing well at sleeping soundly.

When they eventually pulled up to the house, he was surprised to see his car parked up outside. Apparently, Hannibal had taken the liberty of collecting it from the bar he'd had to abandon it at. He collected his bag and practically scrambled out, then realised he didn't have the key anymore, and turned back and held out his hand to Hannibal. Hannibal obliged, undoing his seatbelt and returning the key from his pocket, sliding out the car himself.

As soon as the key was placed in Will's palm, he was up on the porch, hearing the whines and barks and clawing already. By the time he'd unlocked the door, hands hurried, Hannibal was beside him, and was instantly caught in the haze of dog hair and wiggling bodies and whiplike tails.

Will's smile was like that of child's, squatting down to muzzle-height so they could all try to lick at his face and nuzzle into his clothes, tackling them with cuddles and petting, some of the larger creatures tails catching him in the face. Whilst returning the equally excited hellos, Winston shoved into him and pushed him to the floor. His laugh made Hannibal smile too, tickling any dog's head that came to check on him before bounding back to their real master, finally returned. It struck him that this hodgepodge of strays Will had collected really did feel like a family- a sense of belonging was vital to Will, just not in relation to people.

"I think they thought I was never coming back." Will said, cradling Buster's face in his hands.

"They're certainly pleased to see you. They'd get far less excited whenever I showed up- clearly hoping to see someone else in my place."

Will clambered up, "Thanks for looking after them. You didn't have to do that."

"It was my pleasure. They grew to like me, I think." In reply, Will scoffed, making a small gesture with his hand that had them all galloping off into the field. Spare Winston, who stood beside Will's calf and gave Hannibal a wary look. He, seemingly, hadn't grown to like Hannibal at all.

"Do you wanna know something?" Will offered suddenly, quirking a brow when Hannibal's eyes went from the dog to his own, a smile etched in the lines of his face. He tilted his head slightly, and didn't react further, because Will's lips were suddenly on his. The bitter taste of cigarettes, and wine, and sweetness of apricots. His hands on him. Gentle, warm, and over too fast with a short bark of protest from the dog overseeing them. When Hannibal reopened his eyes, Will's hands were off of him but he stood inches away, looming as if to tease Hannibal to take similar action, speaking lowly against his face, "I've waited for weeks to do that."

Hannibal leaned a little towards him when he moved back, searching for the heat of his kiss again, mirth deepening the colour of his eyes. He easily reigned himself in, pushing his hands back into the pockets of his coat. Will only smiled lopsidedly and looked off at his dogs sniffing around in the muddy grass. God, he'd missed them, missed his house. Far more than he realised. He felt relieved. He felt *home*.

After a moment of letting Hannibal quietly remember how the porch's lighting played on his face, Will met his gaze again. Hannibal blinked, gracious, like a cat: "You are a marvel, Will Graham."

A coy scowl dented Will's brow as he willed himself to suppress the blush that washed up past his neck, still smiling unwittingly. He twiddled the new key in his hand behind his back, "I try." Is all he could really think to say. Hannibal's irises were red, expression... *fond*. Loving. It made his ribs feel tight again, "I'll see you soon, Hannibal."

"I don't doubt it." Will's hands itched to touch him, but he didn't. Hannibal said a few goodbyes to the dogs that tried to follow him, and he returned to his car, disappearing again into the night.

Will, after standing out in the brisk semi-dark and half hoping Hannibal would return, called his pack over and opened the door again with a click. He checked the palm of his hand and the two keys there. He closed his fist, and shut the door behind him.

A few days later, Hannibal got back from the office after a tiring day, following an appointment cancelled last minute that ruined his schedule, completing the paperwork for a referral, and Franklyn going on about all the different wine grapes for thirty five minutes. He'd briefly wondered whether or not he would cook any part of him in wine that same night, in his delirium. He decided that Franklyn didn't deserve it.

Upon entering the house though, Hannibal could sense something was off. No signs of forced entry. No blood. No *expected* guest. But something smelt different, like someone had been there. Or someone was still there. It was like-- *leather?*

He took off his shoes to make minimal noise and went to the kitchen to collect anything to be used as a weapon, if needed, but noticed the source of the smell was coming from the dining room. Silently, he padded down the small hallway, half expecting a someone to jump out, but was stopped in his tracks by what was laid out on the table in front of him: a wall mount of a poorly taxidermied bear head. With a note attached. It read:

> Congratulations! You're now in possession of stolen property! I saw this and thought: "wow this really fucked up... Hannibal would love it!" (The fact that it's a bear is *completely irrelevant*, disregard that I even mentioned it.)
>
> Consider this a thank-you gift. The dogs miss you.
>
> You're welcome.

Accompanied by a small scrawled smiley face. Despite the putrid smell of the shoddy tanning job, and possibly areas of fur loss, it was a thoughtful, sweet-natured gesture. He didn't need to guess who it was from. Hannibal couldn't help the small grin that formed on his own face, even though he now realised Will had taken the key to his house when he'd kissed him. *Clever boy.*

Thankfully, he too had experience breaking into other people's houses, and broke into Will's house the following week to leave a plastic container of some cherry and chocolate marquise- once the strong medication wore off, it was the first thing he eventually ate there, after much deliberation.

A little piece of paper stuck to the top had a date and a time, to be spent at Hannibal's house for dinner, written in perfect script.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, no. Oh no.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

> *It goes without saying that Hannibal Lecter doesn't handle impertinence well. His capacity for vengeance was an entirely other creature of emotion, often cloistered away, bound up like an animal.*
>
> Time to ruin everyone's hopeful expectations.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An empty chair sat next to Hannibal where a place setting had been arranged. And it stayed there for the whole evening, even after he'd eaten. Alone.

Normally, his own company was more than enough, and it wouldn't bother him that he had to enjoy a meal by himself without anyone else to please, but the meal was specially prepared. With Will's palate in mind. And he hadn't come.

It goes without saying that Hannibal Lecter doesn't handle impertinence well. His capacity for vengeance was an entirely other creature of emotion, often cloistered away, bound up like an animal. It was a part of him that remained at odds with his unmatched self-control. In reaction to rejection or betrayal, it could unhinge itself. Himself.

For probably the first time in his life, Hannibal actually felt-- *stood up.* Absent dinner guests had happened before, no doubt, but he'd been looking forward to this day; far more than he should've been. It was a childish kind of glee, knowing he'd be able to enjoy the company of someone that he didn't feel the need to beguile with lavish decorations and lies. Will saw through his facade, at least in part. That was unprecedented. Something he wanted to dissect and preserve.

Later that night, while cleaning up his own plate and sorting out the remainder of the food to be refrigerated, he found himself moping, and growing resentful. *Stewing*. He still hoped to hear a knock at the door. In his heart of hearts, he knew that he'd undoubtably forgive Will for showing up late, or for not showing up at all. Even if he didn't come purely out of spite.

He just didn't know if the forgiveness part would occur before or after he'd seen the bright colours of his insides.

Any calls he tried to make to the new phone he'd gotten Will, had gone to prerecorded voicemail. He'd only rang twice- once out of concern, the other out of a desperation he'd never admit to. The worry that something had happened to Will passed by him briskly, but he

trusted that he wouldn't get himself into anything without a word. He was a professional, after all. With tendency to be malicious and offensive, if he felt so inclined.

Going all the way over to Will's house would probably result in Hannibal trying to kill him, in the mood he was in. Then, predictably, Will's dogs would try to rip him to shreds. He figured he wouldn't; save himself the bother.

In the days following, apathy had quickly plastered over dejection and anger. He'd tried to call Will a few more times, and it was always obviously declined instead of ignored, but he refused to let himself give into the want to go and see him- the excuse being to check if he's okay, as a kind of medical followup. That would be beneath him. *Far too crude*.

"Hello?"

"Hello, I'm calling as a member of the Antiques Arts Association, and I'd like to make an enquiry regarding one of your suppliers."

"*Oh*. Of course." Something creaked, as if they'd sat down, "Do you have a name of the company?"

Hannibal wet his lips, "Ah, yes. I've been told of a private source by the name of *Will Graham?* I was wondering if you could provide any assets contributed to your store under that name?" The line was silent for a moment too long to be considered thoughtful. Hannibal waited, "Hello?"

The voice that came back was noticeably defensive, speech slower, "I'm sorry, that name isn't on the books. Who did you say you were again?"

"Your employer mentioned the name in passing. I'm simply here to ask if you confirm it as a legitimate supplier?" No immediate response, again, so he softened his voice slightly, "I assure no legal action will be taken, it's just that the name has been circulating, and I wished to know of any credibility to the claims."

"Why?"

"It's apparent that the produce is of high value, and could be a worthwhile investment. If so, I'd like to be able to *legitimise* this source... I hope you can understand." There was the sound of paper rustling, and Hannibal smiled himself when a deep sigh resonated down the speaker.

"Okay- *yes*. I've heard the name. I'm not able to give you the contact information, because I'm not getting anyone in trouble."

Hannibal inclined his head, "Are you aware, then, of any problems with the company?"

"He- *it's* not a company. Not... *properly*-- look, I know he has financial issues, so he provides to us, and other places, to get his money's worth, y'know? It's nothing insidious. Not what it sounds like." Hannibal took a pen from his desk drawer and flipped to a clean page after his psychiatric notes, "People don't ask too many questions around here. We're *certainly* not supposed to answer them."

"When you say financial issues, do you mean-- debts?"

Another harsh sigh, "To people he *definitely shouldn't* have debts with-- hey, actually- *listen*, I've got to go. If you still want to contact him, you're going to have to find your own way. I've probably said more than I should've." She cleared her throat, "But if you're going to help him as you say, we never spoke, okay? He's not on any records, so you can't prove anything. Got it?"

"Of course. Thank you so much for your time." The line went dead, and Hannibal looked at his phone, thinking.

He'd already called a dealership closer to him, that Will had told him about once, when, admittedly, he was a bit too high on morphine. They hadn't been nearly this useful. Will had mentioned that someone had tried to threaten him there; that they said they knew what he was up to. At the time, he'd laughed at them. Until they'd pulled out a gun, and it had become no laughing matter, and he was warned to not mess with any preconceived 'business'.
("Whatever the fuck that meant.")

Maybe Will had ignored the warning, went into someone else's territory, and got in trouble for it? But who could he be indebted to? How do thieves even accumulate debt? Favours? Money in exchange for secrecy? Maybe.

Larceny is a cyclical thing. And from what Hannibal could piece together, not necessarily worth it.

But, then again, *he's not one to talk.*

Either way, Hannibal was good with getting whatever information he needed. People often told him too much. He'd noticed that it was definitely associated with his psychiatrist nature- that he carried this air of confidence and curiosity about him that made people feel able to confide in him. It'd taken a lot of work to craft that. His voice was another useful factor: it managed to convey what his suits did in person: the epicurean, intriguingly eastern-European accent made him sound eccentric, intelligent. Trustworthy.

If anyone could ask around and uncover whatever he wished without getting overly involved, it'd be him.

As soon as she hung up, the woman Hannibal had been talking to chewed on the inside of her lip for a minute, before dialling a number and putting the phone to her ear again: "Will?"

"*...Bev?"*

"Yeah, hi. I've just had a weird phone call. Some guy from an antique association? He was asking about you."

"*What?* What did he want?"

"I don't know. He was basically trying to find out who you supply to, I think. Wanted to know if you were legit." Will took a long inhale on the other end of the line, and Beverly chewed

on her lip again.

"And? What did you tell them?"

She scowled, guilt creeping up to her, "Not enough for them to find you." She breathed, "I said you were a source, but I didn't give details! They said the law wouldn't be involved, and he sounded sincere about that. I think they wanna invest in you, or something. I don't think they actually know about the origins of your stuff."

"Okay. *Okay*. I guess that's-- fine?" She could tell he was rubbing a hand down his face, like he often did when stressed. She smiled, almost sympathetically, even though he couldn't see.

"Seems you've earned quite a reputation now, huh?" Will didn't scoff at that, "You're doing okay, aren't you? I haven't seen you round here since more than a week ago."

"Yeah. I'm good, actually. The dogs are good. I've just been... *busy*." Busy antagonising people. Busy purposefully staying at home, and ignoring the fact that he had a date to go to. Busy shit-stirring to challenge people's priorities, "Business been okay without your favourite friendly face?"

"It's been slow. You should pop down soon. We should grab a coffee- get you to pay this time." Finally, a laugh.

"Sure. I will when I can. Thanks for the call and letting me know, by the way. I appreciate it."

"No sweat." And the call ended. It left Will somewhat confused, but mostly happy to have heard Bev's voice. She was the only person he could potentially call a friend, and would get on with like a house on fire if they spent more time together. It was always good to hear from her- she was unwarrantedly nice to him at all times, and made him feel, well, special. The only other person that really did that was-- *Hannibal*. Hm.

If confronted, he'd make pisspoor excuses for it, like forgetfulness, or dog troubles, but in reality his only explanation was that he didn't go to Hannibal's because he didn't feel like it. *Well*, yes and no.

Maybe it was some kind of defence technique, to push people away if he thought the relationship was getting too familiar, or a fucked up need to ruin perfectly good things, like self-sabotaging, but it did it's job in weeding out people who just weren't good enough to be associated with him. He wanted people to be persistent, to be passionate. To *want* to be in his life, because of *him*. No shallow bullshit. No ulterior motives. There were those who were apt enough to break down the walls he'd put up, and those that weren't. Most so far, *weren't*.

Hannibal was about to change that. Or rather, utterly ruin it.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, I did warn you.

(Don't mean to be gushy, but thanks a bunch for all the kudos, by the way. Comments make my day, to be honest. I really value all the support, it's what made me continue this thing in the first place.)

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

> *So, regretfully, there Will was, sitting up in bed in the pitch black at the responsible time of four in the morning, trying to hear whatever the fuck his dogs had woken him up about.*
>
> Knock! Knock! Who's there? x2.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hearing noises at night wasn't uncommon for someone basically living in the middle of nowhere. Will knew this.

Being surrounded by woodland heralded too many sounds that would be considered preternatural if you hadn't heard them before-- *Christ, have you heard foxes scream? Nightmare achievement unlocked.* The wind making the very house around him shake during colder nights was an expectation by now. Arguably, the worst thing would be the owls that would just screech into the dark, for hours unending, sounding like a neglected child left out in the company of the trees; to the mercy of all things nocturnal and eldritch.

That doesn't even account for the small army of dogs that he owned- they could probably all sleep soundly through a gunfight. Scratching, shuffling, even something being knocked off the table, didn't scare Will awake anymore. Buster or Zoe, the ironically smallest pair of the group, would always yap at any raccoons, or particularly bold whitetails that would roam too close to the house- a want to predate wildlife deep in the terrier heritage surging up- and Will would grumble at them until they gave up their arguments.

This in mind, anyone would be rational and right in thinking that any abnormal noises didn't bother Will in the slightest. Or, *hadn't*, until he'd come off of the phone with Bev. Since then, everything made him overtly paranoid, substantiated by his poor choice to stand Hannibal up (he'd describe it as a *poor choice,* not because of any insight into how dangerous the man was, but entirely because he'd begun to miss him). It was the first night in a handful of days that he'd settled down well- with the help of a bit too much whiskey- actually feeling able to sleep. *More fool him.*

So, regretfully, there Will was, sitting up in bed in the pitch black at the responsible time of four in the morning, trying to hear whatever the fuck his dogs had woken him up about. Then, he heard it: a... *snort?*

...Do pigs often wander off and turn up on people's doorsteps?

It sounded like someone was full-on snoring just outside the door, followed by scrabbling. He picked up a glass ashtray and turned on the bedside light as he crept to the door. When he clicked the key and pulled the handle, the scratching got more apparent, and he'd only got the door cracked open before something darted past his legs and into the house. Instinctively, Will raised his chosen blunted weapon in a feigned threat, but glass promptly thudded against the wooden flooring, finding himself bewildered upon recognising what the home invader really was.

It was a pug. Muddy, and wheezing with over-exertion that made its shocking eyes wider and frightening, but a pug nonetheless. Will hissed a small sound at the dogs to keep away to avoid scaring him further, watching the fawn-coloured loaf-sized creature loudly sniff around the room in a dazed hurry, shaking with fear and disorientation. It was like he was searching for a trace of someone.

He was lost. And panicking.

Will had dealt with some petrified dogs in his time, but this one really took the cake. After an hour of running about the place, the poor thing had seemingly tired himself out, resorting to something Will could only identify as a strop. He warmed to Will once he'd given him a few treats, gingerly sitting next to him as he sat cross-legged on the floor next to his fishing equipment; shushing him, gently petting him, and asking him where he'd come from, as if he could reply. If only he could've.

Within the first five minutes of being around the little pug, he noticed his dislike of the rest of the group. It appeared that he didn't find them appealing- like he wasn't even a dog himself. Slowly, Will introduced each one of the others, who were all far more pleased to see him than they normally were with a newcomer. All crowding around to get a good sniff in. Will broke it up when he noticed how anxious it'd made his new friend, laughing at how much it reminded him of himself.

Having said their greetings and welcomed the new arrival, the dogs all settled back into their beds, still rather wary, but always obedient. Will showed him where the food and water was, and he ate quite happily. His demand for comfort was brazen at best, so he was used to being either pampered, or ignored. Will hoped it wasn't the latter.

He'd later get him checked at the vet for a microchip, find nothing, and decide to keep him to make sure he was never ignored again.

Having done the other essentials, Will originally offered a spare cushion and a blanket as a makeshift bed, but the anxious being didn't settle for hours- he'd left him to figure it out by himself, having done all he could and grown tired with the surprise of it all.

Will found the little guy sound asleep on his shoes the next morning, squished and drooling. The snoring was music to his ears.

He'd call him Frank. After Sinatra.

Trying not to wake his new dozing pug, he turned over and snatched up his phone. No more missed calls from Hannibal. There had been four, even the last of which he couldn't bring

himself to answer. He'd expected him to turn up at his house by the weekend, if he hadn't taken the silent treatment as a message to leave him be- Will trusted that he wouldn't; it would make no sense. Hannibal was a vastly intelligent man, and busy, too: he'd be able to understand. *Hopefully*.

As quiet as his movements to get out of bed were, evidently nothing got past Frank, and he awoke as soon as Will's feet touched the floor. The rest of the dogs picked themselves up too, all hungry. As always, Will greeted them with a good morning, and led them to the kitchen.

Once both himself and the dogs were fed, Will got a shower. It would've been like any other shower, but when he was drying himself off the same desperate snorting from the previous night came from behind the door, and he sighed. He heard the same noise, like a perpetual reminder of his existence, as he was getting dressed, made harder by the pug wriggling around his feet. Will supposed the loud sniffing and breathing was mostly to do with his bad breeding, but it made him sound like he was telling Will he was there. Just in case he forgot. Whenever he'd say Frank's name or comfort him with little pats, his tail- that didn't curl like a normal pug- would wiggle, and his ears would go back in excitement. So grateful for any affection thrown his way.

Frank's upsetting yearning for attention, far more severe than any of the other dogs, made him change his mind. His plan had been to hit a big Craftsman style house about twenty minutes out- he'd noticed the lack of security system on one of his frequent trawls through whatever neighbourhoods caught his eye, or ones he hadn't visited in a while; he didn't have a pattern. Honestly, it was a game of eenie-meenie-miney-mo on which house to scope out and eventually tackle. Without the security, he expected to find guns, which are easily rid of and turn around a great profit. He was looking forward to it.

Alas, Frank's tiny, squished face had proved to be a far better deterrent than the law, and with one sad look sent his way when he was halfway out the door, he decided to take the dogs out on an afternoon walk instead, and spend the rest of the day making some new rabbit snake lures he'd been meaning to try out. He'd taken an unearthly shine to this difficult dog, which would be dulled in time, once he'd properly settled in and needed less babying. Since then, Will was far too happy to oblige him.

With whiskey slowly dissipating in a nearby tumbler, he let Frank sit on his lap as he sat at his desk tying the flies, Winston lounging on his bed, and the border collie cross Max slept at his feet, keeping them warm. The others were milling about and lying around. All of their ears almost simultaneously pricked up when they heard the noise of a car in the distance. In the same instance, Will's mouth went dry.

Will watched the unassuming car approach the house, tying off and cutting the string before getting up. He knocked anything that flashed golden or silver into drawers or under pillows before the porch light clicked on, and there was a heavy-handed knock at the door. He instructed the dogs to quietly stay away with a gesture and few clicks of his tongue, the only one not responding being Frank. Another knock hammered, and Frank went to bark again, so Will just huffed and scooped him up. He held him under his arm as he answered the door.

He swore his stomach lurched.

Chapter End Notes

I wonder who it could be! (It's not Hannibal, it's someone worse than Hannibal, but will definitely cause just as much violence).

Also, Frank is my own anxious, attention-seeking pug, so if you have anything bad to say about him, you can say it to my face! And yes, I like writing him into any story I can. He's a very good boy.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

"Ah. Do you have the money, then?" A pause.

"No."

Can I get uhhhh one order of murder please?

Chapter Notes

Make that triple.

An curt sneer greeted him, looking between him and the dog in his grip, "To think I thought you were considered tough, Will."

"To think I thought I'd never see you again, Mason." Will offered dryly, glaring.

He put his hand over his heart and gave a genuine smile, purring, "*Oh*, be still my beating heart! You must have that southern charm I've always heard about. I'm flattered!" The look he was giving Will was too fond and too volatile, like he would spring to violence at any second. His manner was deceptively jovial. He looked past Will, into the house, seeing the dogs and raising his eyebrows, "I have to admit, I'm hurt you never invited us over. But it's good to see you again." He leant in, tilting his head, "Did you miss me?"

"No. Strangely enough." Mason frowned, "Are you just here to antagonise me? Because I could do without it."

A gloved hand clapped to Will's bicep fraternally, "*Always* a charmer. I was hoping you'd graciously invite us in. To talk." He had this condescending cadence to his voice, like everything he was saying was a joke. Then again: he'd always spoken like that. Will sighed heavily, putting Frank down when he wiggled, and Mason turned to the man behind him, a henchman Will had seen before, all that time ago: "How much do pugs go for nowadays, Carlo? I'd expect enough for-"

Will looked at him impatiently, "You're not taking him. Don't act like you are."

Mason brightened, "Ah. Do you have the money, then?" A pause.

"*No*." Honestly, if he really pulled one or two strings, *yes, he did.* He just wasn't about to tell him that- he didn't deserve the fucking money. It was the first and last time Will got involved in a gang-like bunch of criminals, most of whom were notorious for fighting and dealing, the occasional petty theft; most of whom were in the security trade, or, that's what they said they were. Criminals are also notorious liars.

Will had only spoken to Mason a few times, made difficult by his distant position as an I-point-you-shoot kind of deal, and how little Will liked him. The reason for his involvement was unclear to Will, as he'd only heard vaguries about failed payments and maliciousness. Of course, Will was roped in by the money: it had felt like he was moving up in the world, so to speak- his boss being rich and powerful as well as somewhat infamous. He certainly hadn't understood how dangerous Mason was.

But not by himself. If he had any troubles, he'd have someone on-hand to deal with them. It was only if his narcissism fuelled pride got in the way did he make house calls.

To be fair, Will had only started shoplifting as a teenage kick, and it had spiralled to housebreaking, and they'd taken advantage of his relative naïveté. It was back in Louisiana, when he worked a job he'd been wrangled into by a friend at the time, and *he* was the one who got into the place and got the goods- the rest of them did fuck all, as far as he was concerned.

He'd jumped ship long before they even realised he'd left. Will had wrongly assumed they got that all the time with rookies they decided to hire, and thought he'd been let off as a runaway. God knows how they'd found him. Or why Mason himself was even bothering. It'd been years. But he was a sadistic fuck, by all accounts. Of course he'd want to be there in person; it wasn't about the money, he was just there to enjoy the show.

"Pardon me?"

"No. I don't have the money."

"That's a damn shame." Mason pushed the door open and Will didn't stop him, even when they both came in, and the door closed behind them. Will figured that Mason didn't know how dangerous *he* was, either.

Will watched passively as Mason circled him like some kind of predator encircling prey. A thick silence took over the room. He took a long look at the inscrutable bodyguard who stood cross-armed in front of the door.

The dogs stayed put, only moving to growl when Mason walked by them, making him crack a smile. Frank stayed behind Will's legs, "I must say, I'm surprised. I haven't heard your name in so long, I feared you were dead." *Feared. Yeah, right.* Will gave him a cursory glance, watching him poke at the equipment on his desk, "I take it you're still in the business though, or we wouldn't have got a call to tell us where you were. Holed up here like a wolf in a den. Very *mysterious*, Mr. Graham. I like it." He picked up a pair of scissors when he thought Will wouldn't notice, moving behind him. Frank tried to stand in between Will's feet, "I used to cut open things the size of him when I was a boy. My mother once had a cat she kept very near-and-dear. *Vicious* thing. It cuffed me around the face when I was a child--"

"Leave the dogs out of this." Mason crossed over to the bed, testing the comfort of the mattress with his free hand. The man by the door moved to stand by the fireplace.

"She never found the sweet thing, of course. I cut open bigger things now. It's more fun that way."

"Are you going to cut *me* open?" Will inquired after a moment, blinking at him, and Mason laughed.

"All in good time." He moved fast, but Will didn't flinch, and Mason jumped down on the bed, his hands behind his head and feet crossed at the ankle. Will didn't look impressed, even less so when his voice dropped slightly, "Hey. How about we just forget about this? And you just-- *Pay* me another way. *What'd you say?* I don't bite." Mason sniped, enjoying the discomfort that singed Will's features, gone in an instant.

He wanted to crawl out of his skin at the thought. Will levelled his gaze, unaffected, "Take me out to dinner first. Besides, a little birdie tells me I'm not quite your type." Will quirked a brow, ducking his head at him to drive the point home.

A grotesque thing glinted in Mason's eyes, "Little birdies. Yes." He looked away as if he was mulling over something. Will averted his eyes.

"So. Are you going to *do* something? Are you going to *leave?* Do I throw a stick, or...?" That made Mason's grin return, feline and sinister. But he didn't answer, so Will moved to the door and whistled, the dogs then scampering out. Frank took more encouraging. Once they'd all left, Will shut the door again. When he turned back around, Mason was on his feet.

"I'll adhere to curtesy. I'll let you decide- we are in your house, after all. What do *you* want us to, Will?" It wasn't a matter of debate; he had that *look* in his eyes, something depraved. The blade of the scissors glinted in between his fingers, his father's knife quick to hand in his coat pocket. In retaliation, Will picked up an empty bottle off the shelf, and casually smashed it against the edge of the table. No one moved an inch.

"Whatever you came here to do."

The driver in the car outside could see in the window, and saw Mason surge forward, and could hear the muffled blows and scuffling of the fight, but didn't see what happened. The dogs barked angrily outside the door, one of the bigger ones jumping up to scratch at it in earnest.

After a few minutes the door flew open, and the driver expected them both to come sauntering out, but there was nothing. The dogs barged their way inside. Then, Mason fell through the door, struggling to remain standing, his chest heaving, possibly with laughter. There was no sign of Will.

Mason limped, but fell down the porch steps gracelessly, trying to get up. It was like watching an injured deer struggle to stand. The driver undid his belt hurriedly in his haste to get out of the car. But Will appeared, imposing in the still line of his shoulders silhouetted by the lamplight.

Just as the driver was half out of the car, and Mason was on his feet, Will raised something on two hands, and the reverberating sound of a shot rang out, loud enough to deafen. The driver's body dropped, and Mason took off running. Across the field. Yelling- the shrill of his voice sounding as if he was in merriment. Chased by a few of the dogs now, screaming louder.

The dogs were about to catch him, ready to sink their bared teeth in, when there was a shunt and a click, followed by another sharp boom of gunfire, and Mason dropped to the ground. The dogs caught up.

Inhaling deeply, Will held the rifle loosely by his side and watched, wide awake and in perfect clarity; looking over at the blood that tarnished the sleek shine of the car in the first slivers of dull moonlight. He whistled loudly when the squeals finally stopped, and the dogs, that looked more like wolves with mouths coloured red, raced back to him. Emptying the barrel, he leant the gun against the armchair, and stepped over the faceless, disembowelled body of the henchman to pick up his phone. Thinking, he hesitated. There was still freshly scraped skin caught under his fingernails when he tapped out the number.

Hannibal, initially, was going to ignore any calls made to him. He was in his study, in the middle of redrawing Géricault's *Raft of Medusa* from memory, having completed some notes regarding his last session. Only when his phone went off for the third time in quick succession, did he give in and answer it, already knowing whose phone it would be from, but not whose voice would speak to him. He didn't greet the caller, but was oddly pleased to hear a familiar voice through the receiver.

"Speaking when spoken to? That's not like you."

Hannibal narrowed his eyes a little, lifting the pencil from the page, "That's an unwelcome assumption, Will. Do you know what *is* like me?"

Will looked down at the bloodied corpse on the floor: "Funny you should ask."

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

He could smell the bitterness of brain matter, and the cold trace of a bullet. Turning back to Will, he quirked a brow.

"Who are these people? To you?"

"Dead. Thank fuck."

Hannibal turns up. Will is scary. Out of the frying pan and into the fire.

"I can't help thinking that there is a recurring theme to our recent encounters, Will." Hannibal finally said, after taking a moment to smell the blood in the air, and drink in the sight: the scattered mound of the human carcass in the field being sniffed at by a few of the dogs, limned by the moon, the night air brisk and as cold as the paling skin of the corpses. The man he was addressing stood in the doorway of the house, unmoving as he approached.

"*Hm*. What makes you say that?" Hannibal turned to the clumsy form of the driver, having fallen hard against the car and landed half-out of the vehicle, his skull opened up. He could smell the bitterness of brain matter, and the cold trace of a bullet. Turning back to Will, he quirked a brow.

"Who are these people? To you?"

"Dead. Thank fuck." Will sighed, looking over to the dogs he'd herded back outside to avoid getting bloodied paw-prints throughout the house. Winston stood by the porch steps diligently, drying blood on his fur. Hannibal came onto the porch, taking a place by Will's side, and looking out too. He stole a glance to the far more brutalised body inside the door. It had been personal. And it had left carnage, in his way and in his wake.

It was rather-- beautiful. To witness the aftermath of what he saw as an awakening. Of what, he couldn't decide.

"You're hurt." Hannibal noticed the hot blood around a tear in the fabric of his shirt along the side of his torso. Will looked down at himself.

"Oh, yeah. I may have been gently stabbed."

"I'd assumed the use of the adverb changes it's severity?" Hannibal quipped, bring his hands up to unbutton Will's shirt.

Will met his gaze, his eyes strangely distant, but tone of voice light, "It's different because I say it is. I'm pretty sure it's a flesh wound- I can hardly feel it."

A smile crept into the lines of Hannibal's face: "It's probably because of the adrenaline. Murdering multiple people can have that effect--" Will's hand snapped to his wrist, stopping his actions, and he looked at him intensely for a long moment, tension heating the air. He looked... *furious*. As if he could've killed him too, or done-- *something*. Hannibal inclined his head, keeping his tone detached, "Unless you wish to die of infection, this must be seen to." After an extended pause, Hannibal undid another button, and Will let go, looking away, expression closed off again.

Once Hannibal had found any first aid supplies under the kitchen sink and from the bathroom, Will was scowling, settled in one of the armchairs with his eyes closed; all that adrenaline was beginning to wear off, it seemed. Taking off his coat and suit jacket, Hannibal rolled up his sleeves, donned gloves, and peeled back the shirt plastered to Will's skin. In reaction, Will only inhaled sharply through his teeth, or grimaced, hardly watching Hannibal at all as he cleaned and stitched up the wound. He only met his eyes once, when he applied the bandage. *Was it guilt? Was it gratitude?* Carefully, he washed and bandaged Will's bloodied knuckles too.

Unprompted, Hannibal passed him a few fingers of whiskey to wash away the resultant ache, turning to tidy away the equipment, "What do you expect of me, Will?" Swallowing, Will huffed a long sigh, his head lulling back against the chair.

"What do you--"

"You know what I mean." Hannibal went back to the bed and closed the medical case, feeling Will's eyes on the broad expanse of his back: "I'm standing directly adjacent to what I mean." They both didn't need to look at Carlo's body, glass still embedded in his eye socket. Hannibal's piercing, maroon eyes were on him again. He sounded mocking, "Am I simply here to clean up your messes?"

"No, I--"

"Do you liken me to a housemaid?"

"No." Although, Will did think a *little bit* about the maid thing.

"Then, what? The only reason you've called upon me has been after bloodshed." He sounded calm. *Too* calm.

Will wouldn't look at him when he turned to face him, taking another sip of whiskey, considering the empty tumbler and turning it in his hand, "The first time was different. This was self defence."

"This is not self defence. You've mutilated the bodies."

Will finished his drink, expression drawn and unreadable when he finally looked up at him: "What are you trying to say?"

Hannibal seemingly adjusted the cuff of his shirt as he pulled down his sleeves, his shadow looming over him: "Do you trust me? Are you sure? What makes you believe that I won't go to the authorities with this?" It was an empty threat, if that wasn't obvious. He could tell there was something there Will was restraining himself from saying, or doing. It lingered in the air, a scent, sweeter- in between the stench of metallic fluid and early decomposition, tainted by smell of pain. Pain is bitter on the tongue.

Distracted, Will half-shrugged, rather nonplussed. He stared at Carlo's limp hand on the wood of the floor, palm up, "What choice did I have?" He offered, frowning, speaking slowly and fixing his gaze entirely on Hannibal, "Would you rather they killed me?"

That didn't change Hannibal's expression as much as he thought it would, "I think you already know the answer to that."

"Do I?" Will raised his eyebrows, trying to tell what Hannibal was feeling by the dark look in his eyes. He wouldn't be able to- not yet: his violence isn't comparable to Mason's. You could only tell if you know what to look for. If he was angry, a question wouldn't need to be asked. Will placed his glass on the side with a clink, standing up, "You didn't have these issues before."

"I wasn't insulted before." Guilt flickers in Will's chest, briefly.

"You think that warrants this?"

Hannibal ignored the question, and his demeanour changed then, a curiosity seizing him, as if in therapy, "The man in the field- you had the choice to let him run. Why didn't you?"

"He would've come back." Will said, without thinking. He forgot to add that he hated the man.

"You know them?"

"You already know that." Again, without thinking. Maybe it's because he's angry. Though he doesn't entirely feel betrayed, he feels... *flattered? Really?*

Hannibal tilts his head when Will sighs, "Are you making an accusation?"

Will stared at him. He knew it was a dangerous thing to say, especially in these circumstances where there is already enough blood thrown around. Someone else's could've easily been added to it. When Hannibal didn't move at all, attention zeroed in, Will took a step forward, voice quieter, but calmer than before: "I know you did this." Hannibal's eyes changed before he'd even finished the sentence, but reverted back when he added, "*Don't* start acting coy." The expression that earned him was intense and implacable.

"And why would I do that, Will?" The timbre of his voice struck Will then, sounding ominous. With the aversion of his eyes to look outside, *away* from him, the tension snapped in two.

"Resentment. Bitterness. Spite. The emotions we normally feel when wronged, especially by someone we care about." And he had been wronged, by him. Being blown off didn't warrant this sort of action, but it showed his hand; it showed his ability to deceive, and be deceived, in it's entirety. He'd shown himself to Will, perhaps indirectly, and Will found it impressive. *Admirable*. Fuck knows why, he definitely shouldn't have done: "People don't often act on those feelings. Not to this extent. But I guess... we're different." Will couldn't help but smile a little, gesturing vaguely.

Hannibal didn't say anything but his hand stirred again when Will moved closer, and he finally understood what he'd hidden up his sleeve.

Will really didn't know him at all.

So incalculable. It thrilled him, some wild thing keening inside him. Slowly, Will took hold of his wrist and lifted it, and remarkably, Hannibal allowed him to do so, watching. He pushed up the sleeve to reveal the blade of a scalpel, gently removing it, quietly intrigued by how Hannibal's fingers opened to him. Yielding.

He took the scalpel in his hand. And raised it to touch the line of Hannibal's throat.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Something vaguely vulnerable glistened in his empty eyes, moving behind them like a rare creature in a darkened aquarium.

A revelation occurs (kind of). Will is frustrating (sometimes). Hannibal is emotional (and a bit of a dick). Prepare yourself for a vulnerable Hannibal, and a surprise at the end.

Chapter Notes

This is actually a suitable chapter for Valentine's Day. If you enjoy having to clean up dead bodies and blood everywhere, even better!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He sighed almost wistfully, searching Hannibal's face, his eyes as abstruse as they were when he'd seen them for the first time: "Try to help me understand something." Hannibal looked to him, equally unsettling, "Why would you try to kill a man you've saved from death once before?"

Hannibal got somewhat distracted as he imagined how simple it would be to overpower him, watch the light drain from his lovely eyes, and string him up with his fishing wire. He'd do the same with his victims, all posed together. Maybe like a dollhouse scene. Though, he wouldn't harm the dogs- he'd leave them shut in the house with the bodies until they were desperate enough to eat them. Or he'd have mercy, and make an anonymous tip on an untraceable phone, something about howling. He kept his hands by his sides. He couldn't do that anyway.

"The emotions we normally feel when wronged." He mimicked, feeling the blade push firmer against his neck, "Especially by someone we care about." It occurred to him then, steel licking at his fragile skin, that his pondering of malice was a means of resistance. To be rebuttal against what he was truly feeling; had been since they met.

All that he loved often ended with violence.

Will rephrased the question: "Why not do it yourself?"

"I'm a generous man. I figured I'd give those you are indebted to a scent to follow." Narrowing his eyes, Will found that he didn't believe him. It was probably a half-truth. It definitely wasn't the case of Hannibal being to much of a coward to do it himself- it's one of the last words he'd associate with him.

Maybe it was wanting to give him a fighting chance. That seemed more likely. *And goddamned terrifying.*

"Why were you in someone else's house? All that time ago?"

Even at knifepoint, the blade dimpling the skin to the extent that it was about to draw blood, Hannibal looked completely at ease. His voice even and deliberate, devoid of fear. His eyes were the only indication of danger, but not that he was in it, "I thought you didn't want to know." He had the gall to look smug.

Will didn't want to have to repeat himself. Judging by what Hannibal was capable of after Will hadn't gone on one fucking date with him, it was for the best that Will didn't know what he was planning to do to whoever came through the door next, "Why didn't you let me die in that alleyway?"

That was a difficult thing to ask. Not that he would've wanted to die from blood loss in an alley. That would've been-- *disappointing*. It was one of the very rare moments that made him feel grateful, to think of what Hannibal did for him. He didn't particularly want it to be ruined by some sordid, malicious reason behind it.

He was surprised by Hannibal's answer, all the cockiness eradicated from his expression replaced with sincerity, "You asked for my help. So I gave it to you."

That could've meant too many things. Will didn't want to think about it.

"This is more than the date, isn't it?" Hannibal didn't answer him. Didn't move. Just looked at him, his gaze affectless. Will leant in closer, eyes searching, feeling Hannibal's pulse thump through the scalpel. It felt like it was reverberating into his hand, through his own veins. His voice dropped to a grumble, cutting: "Why?"

Hannibal hesitated, "Why what, Will?"

"Why me?"

He heard as Hannibal took a slow inhale, slightly deeper than his otherwise regulated breathing. Their exchanged stare was full of an unidentifiable emotion, raw and as volatile as a the click of an engaged bullet. His hand pressed close to Hannibal's throat was unwavering. So ready, it rendered the man unable to know if fighting back would be to any avail. Hannibal's eyes, dilated black, softened.

"I don't quite know, myself."

It wasn't what he said, it was the way he said it. Rather accidentally, not entirely aware of the weight of the words until they fell off his tongue. When he closed his mouth afterwards, it

was deliberate. To halt anything further. Something vaguely vulnerable glistened in his empty eyes, moving behind them like a rare creature in a darkened aquarium.

Will felt his chest tighten, lowering his voice to resemble a whisper, still too loud in the quiet of the room: "Tell me."

Hannibal's lips parted, lost to sensation. And closed. He seemed to shut himself away then, cloistering any suggested emotion somewhere else in the corridors of his mind. Any fondness and enrapture dissipated from his expression, gone even from his eyes, and it made Will's grip on the scalpel falter at the suddenness of it all- more at the subtlety.

"We need to sort out the bodies." *How romantic,* "This can wait." Will wasn't even sure what this was, but found himself taking the blade away instead of through Hannibal's artery, his brain feeling short-circuited, completely spun for a loop. He registered as Hannibal moved away, if reluctantly. The cold metal was taken from his hand, the night air cold against the exposed skin of his torso. He turned to look back down at the body on his floor.

Given the effect it had, Hannibal may as well have answered him. *Did*, in his silence. In that look.

It made reality seem a little hard to hold on to. No longer grounded and entirely present; Hannibal's admittance- or lack of it- had made Will feel stranger than *murdering others did.* It left him in shock.

Trying to fully grasp whatever had just happened, Will still helped to wrap Carlo's body up in the rug it had fallen on, fetching himself a drink as he watched Hannibal through the window. He-- *marvelled* at seeing the man throw the corpse of the driver into the boot of the car with little effort.

A few of the more doting dogs came back inside, the little pug trotting up to Will and sniffing at his ankles. They nosed at his hands when he crouched, helping to bring him back to himself properly.

Despite his shock, he had probably reached a decision before his wounds were patched up, or even when they were being made. However unwilling to, Will had recognised his interest in Hannibal. That interest grew into an odd emotion he couldn't quite place, something he hadn't felt at such an intensity before.

Hatred morphed into it's opposite.

He'd always struggled to believe that anyone could feel the same for him. Will didn't think he was ever able to be loved back, or for anything he felt to be truly requited. He felt things too deeply for that.

Most of the time, in love, it was hard to determine if his feelings for someone were merely reflections, cast on him because of his unwanted ability to empathise. Anyone on the receiving end of his affections normally didn't share them, mainly because of his abrasiveness; ridiculously bad at conveying the proper depth and breadth of his feelings to someone, past flirtation. As much as he'd want to.

Maybe that played a part in why he never kept human company; he wasn't oversensitive, it was more-- impressionable, especially when it came to the moods of people around him. Dogs' poor moods can be ameliorated with a single word, or a treat, or a certain tone of voice. In his experience, people were much more difficult.

When people always treat you as an outsider and a stranger, you begin to act like one- he distanced himself. From everything but what he loved, or could love.

And he felt that he could love Hannibal.

A brave surge whipped through him- inspired by liquid courage, for sure- and when Hannibal came back inside, blood on him too after hiding Mason's body, Will grabbed him. Kissing him until any lingering doubts, were gone.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know yet, but there may or may not be some sexy times ahead. Let me know if you want that. I think the maximum chapter number is 16 (18 at a push), so get it in while you can if you feel like it should happen.

Come say hi on tumblr!

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

> *To himself, he pondered that this is a far better option than those he planned for, or gave enough thought to- he subdued a smile thinking about it, the unpredictability of this. Of Will.*

> You guys asked for this. I hope it's okay? I mean, this is my second time writing The Sex, so yknow. Don't hate me.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It took a moment for Hannibal's hands to land on Will's waist, taken completely by surprise at how he'd sprung at him as soon as he came back in the door. But he couldn't complain- wasn't given the chance to, anyway. The kiss was intense, deepened as Will took hold of his waistcoat and pulled him towards him, teeth clashing, a tongue caught between them. He was being pulled, stepping towards Will as he moved back, chasing his mouth and the hands that held him. Then, without even thinking about it, Will surged, gripping the fabric tight, and spun them around, shoving Hannibal down unceremoniously onto the bed.

"Stay there." Will instructed, gesturing with his hand. Hannibal looked-- *dishevelled*, a least a little, and by God, was it a sight to behold. His hair being slightly out of place did things to Will that he didn't know he had the capacity to feel about messed hair. His sleeves rolled up, clothes rumpled, lips wet, yet still composed. A puzzle of contradictions. Will was determined to change that... just, *not immediately.*

As if the man wasn't even there, Will turned around and whistled for the dogs, rounding them up as they came galloping in, closing the door behind them. He didn't meet Hannibal's gaze again, not even to repeat his instruction, and went to the kitchen to feed them. Hannibal heard the clatter of bowls and crunching, relaxing somewhat into the mattress, stretching out but still lying on his back; entirely focused on his given task of staying still. He would allow himself to submit. Patiently, he folded his hands on his stomach.

To himself, he pondered that this is a far better option than those he planned for, or gave enough thought to- he subdued a smile thinking about it, the unpredictability of *this*. Of Will.

The aforementioned reentered the room again, taking up his neglected glass from the desk and turning around to face him. The look exchanged was dark, full of mirth, silently deciding what to do with him. Will's ocean eyes blown wide by the introduction of whiskey and lust, the colour of the sea before a storm. He too looked like a painting, bathed in the orange light, reflecting softly on the curve of his cheekbones and down his neck. Even as the dogs milled around, settling quickly in their beds, Will's stare was unrelenting, his jaw working as he finished the drink. Hannibal found he couldn't look away, either.

Will's shirt was still hanging open, exposing the line of his torso, perhaps wholly intentionally, or perhaps not. He put the glass down slowly, clinking against the side, but didn't move to touch- leaning back against the desk, unbothered.

"Do you plan on leaving me like this the whole night, Will?" Hannibal inquired, after a long silence of naught but glaring, much like they did in the kitchen that night.

"Would you stay there?" He countered, voice entirely unaffected-- conversational, even. Hannibal adjusted his head, blinking, a tilt to one eyebrow.

"Is that what you'd want?" That made Will fidget, but not in discomfort. There was a pause, tension snapping and fizzling in the air between them, clouds before thunder. Unhurriedly slow, Will came over to him, kneeling on the bed, straddling his thighs. Hannibal didn't touch him, but his fingers itched to.

Will's eyes appeared considerate, watching his expression intently. *Seeing him.* Leaning down, he ghosted over Hannibal's jaw, moving up to hover over his lips, teasing: "No." He finally answered, punctuated by moving down and seizing Hannibal's mouth, feeling broad palms on him again in response.

Kissing him was harsh, messy but sweet, undignified. When he'd fed his dogs he gave himself a moment to wonder when the *fuck* everything changed. When did these interactions begin to feel inevitable? *Why did they?* He didn't understand. Will hadn't wanted someone this much since his late teens- not so juvenile anymore, so much more impassioned. He hadn't felt like this since then. It didn't make sense. But then-- does love make sense? *Ever?* If he believed in providence, in fate, he wouldn't chanced to call it such a thing; would anyway, more likely if he was suddenly embodied by the fucking spirit of Lord Byron himself. Whatever it was, he didn't want to fight it anymore. He didn't have the strength.

Fingertips dug into the flesh of his thighs, tighter when Will began moving against him in slow, languid rolls of his hips, feeling the others arousal against his own through layers of clothing. *Too many godawful layers.* Fumbling, Will worked the buttons on Hannibal's waistcoat, pushing up his shirt to touch his skin, feeling heat and hair, swiftly moving down to his belt buckle.

"Will, your stitches." Hannibal warned, breathless between kisses.

"I don't care." Will murmured against his mouth, biting his lower lip. Hannibal groaned incoherently at the friction. Will was almost certain he could come in his pants from this alone, liquid heat roiling in him, building at the base of his spine. He let up, looking down to

wrestle with the zipper of Hannibal's trousers, deliberately grazing his knuckles against the firm line there.

"Will."

"I don't *fucking* care." He snapped, the hand that was beside his head clapped over Hannibal's mouth then, the same exact moment he was taken in hand, and he made a deep, rumbling noise against Will's palm. With a bit of a struggle of trying to keep both hands on him, Will managed to nudge Hannibal's slacks and briefs down his thighs.

Spitting curtly and reapplying his hand, he revelled in the sounds it unhinged from the man's chest, guttural and *low*; Will watched the controlled snap of his hips to meet his hand, the look and feel of his fingers on him making his heart thump loudly in his ears. Vaguely, he realised that Hannibal's hands one wrist motion away from tearing through his clothes, so Will relented, gracelessly pulling down his own jeans and boxers with one hand. Pushing Hannibal's lips apart with the other, offering fingers to suck.

Witnessing him do so was one of the single most erotic things he'd seen in his entire life.

The dull ache of his wounds hummed under his skin, but it was overpowered by the drive of his arousal, coiled and underlying for too long now. He found that the slickness of saliva wasn't enough, and Will deigned to take his hand off Hannibal's cock to reach for the bedside drawer, scrabbling, an impatient hum sent his way: "Less of that." He threatened, taking the opportunity to strip himself of the rest of his clothes and send them flying, landing in a heap on the floor, his belt buckle clattering.

Closing the cap, he warmed the lube in his hands, well aware of the shock of cold, wet fingers at his most intimate parts- having been offended by that before. Will adjusted the angle of his hips to give something for Hannibal to lean into, moving an arm back suddenly, slowly twisting to open himself up. He groaned at the intrusion wantonly with an arch to his back, his fingers moving from Hannibal's mouth, trailing spit, placing his other hand splayed on the man's chest, pushing down on his sternum, "Oh-- *Fuck*," He spat, and heard one of the dogs, probably Winston, stir and let out a little huff of concern.

He met Hannibal's half-lidded eyes as he pushed himself back onto his own fingers, raw and spitefully confident, body sculpturesque- the bones and veins visible in the strong line of his neck when he tilted his head back; ribs shifting wildly under his golden-lit skin as he began panting moans. His quivering thighs were soft and warm under Hannibal's hands framing the length of his cock, pink and curved towards his stomach.

The sweat pooling along his spine made Will feel molten, radiating heat, spilling, the curl to his body beginning to make his muscles seize up. When he stuttered to pick up the foil dropped on the duvet, Hannibal's hand caught his wrist to keep it there, thumb daringly pressed on his pulse.

An answer to an unvoiced question was displayed in behind his eyes. Will shuddered, partly from the chills, his head swimming with the presentation of such a daring action- wondering how far he was really willing to take this. He saw it when Hannibal's nostrils flared. *Fuck it*, he trusted this man. Somehow, he still did, more than he had anyone before.

Hannibal watched him darkly, enraptured, easing off to holding Will's hips gently as he repositioned himself and began sinking down onto him, inch-by-inch. It made Will wonder whether or not he was this compliant to the other people he'd undoubtably slept with, let fuck him-- *did he let people fuck him often?* Will doubted it. He'd previously imagined him to be gentle in bed, coaxing, not aggressive enough to be thought of as rough-handed; he'd seen an allusive, unknowable version of Hannibal the first time they laid eyes each other, had seen glimpses of it since in those red-tinted eyes. Behind the veil. In other times, he'd been professional and courteous, always kind but never timid- an entire galaxy away from the man he'd just watch toss a corpse into the back of a car like he was dumping a bag of trash, just a few moments beforehand.

This prim and proper display, the one he presented as, was limned by blood. Knowing it, made Will feel as if he was a part of something clandestine. Like he was in on a secret.

Just as it was unreadable and empty in some instances, Hannibal's expression was subtle, but there was a ferocity, an incremental lack of restraint to his movements, that made it... *different*. He was letting himself be seen by Will, only a peek, if he was smart enough to figure it out.

Will doubted few others got to witness this, if at all, such an malignant yet malleable attitude residing in him: a power-play between them the same as a destructive wave against an immovable cliff-face. *Who was who?* They were combative. Horned beasts locked together.

Will felt Hannibal tense as he did, both engulfed, symbiotically reeling off the other's pleasure- the intimacy of it all so overwhelming Will had to close his eyes. He felt like he was drowning. Hang on, he hadn't done this in a long time: it was usually just mouths on one another, or *him* thrusting into *them*, and being reminded of the feeling made his mind whiteout. *Hell*, he couldn't actually recall the last time he'd gotten off on more than his own hands. Saying that, *not in the prime state to be remembering anything, let alone a unenthusiastic handjob.*

At some point, the sutures along his torso, angered red from strain, began bleeding, only slightly. He didn't notice right way, between sweat and the pulsing, heady feeling that overcame him when he was finally sat flush against Hannibal's hips. His mouth hung open, only able to stifle gasps and noises with the working of his throat, waves of pleasure thrumming deliciously throughout his body.

Hannibal sat up, taking hold of his neck to pull him into a kiss, encouraging and lavishly slow. He was somehow formidable even when underneath him. Hurriedly, Hannibal took off his waistcoat and made quick work of the shirt buttons, that vanishing too. Then the warmth of his mouth tucked itself under Will's jaw, pointed teeth scraping at his throat, sucking marks like brands across his shoulder.

Hot palms held onto his back and pulled him closer, Will's own hands finding the damp hair at the nape of Hannibal's neck and scratching through it. A groan was startled from him as Hannibal shifted, urging him to move. So, he started moving. He did until the pleasure was all too much, impaling, and fell forward against Hannibal, pushing them both back down. Will buried his face against him, breathing hard and loud with each other as he was thrust up

into, their noises echoing. Hannibal's hands glided across his back, bleeding warm, his mouth agape against his jaw, teeth on his earlobe, words in his ear making his breath quiver.

There was the smell of blood. *Will's blood.* And all of the sudden, the hands on his back gripped him tightly, and Will was the one being shoved into the mattress, flipped over. He cried out as Hannibal quickened the pace, his weight caging him in like walls all around him, claustrophobic and overwhelming and utterly divine. Arching, the angle brushed his prostate gratuitously, so pleasure begun twisting and burning into pain. And he found himself deliriously clenching his thighs around Hannibal, digging his nails into his shoulder, encouraging him angrily with groans and gritted teeth- wanting to feel this for longer, wanting to be submerged in it. The response was the devastation he'd asked for. He then could only mouth at his jaw, unable to find words.

Keening, Will only begged with a breathless *oh god, please*, and Hannibal moved a hand down to touch him, fist tight and slick, growling foreign words in his ear, lips snarling against the skin of his neck. Teeth there. Before Will could say something witty, his own climax caught him off-guard, punched from his hips like a hit to the base of his spine, the force of it sending him up the bed and scrabbling at the headboard, moaning, almost a howl. He saw stars, felt everything all at once, Hannibal still pushing into him, *once, twice*, and then he buried himself deep, tensing, biting down at his shoulder with a harsh noise he felt as vibrations rather than heard. Will felt the warmth uncurl inside him, spill out of him, the same as the air pulled entirely from his lungs.

Hannibal remained still, heavy, sprawled over him for a few long minutes like an unvanquished beast over prey, proprietorial. Possessive. When Will's mind resurfaced, the sweat was cooling and making him cold, Hannibal's weight dead and oddly comfortable. He couldn't help but laugh a little: "I'm sorry, I just--" The weight on top of his shifted, moving to look him in the eye, and he found Hannibal smiling responsively; feeling a gentle nuzzle at his cheek in want of a kiss. Will was still smiling and stifling a bout of giggles. He couldn't quite fathom how the evening had gone this way, but, as fucked up as it probably was, it was worth it. Even still, "This is fucked up. We're going to Hell for this."

Will turned his head, and Hannibal kissed him, a smile sung in his eyes, "For you, I would go happily."

He scoffed a laugh, possibly blushing but *no one could prove it in court*: "That's disgusting."

Reluctantly, Hannibal clambered off of him to clean up- upon returning, gentle hands held him and wiped him down, carefully washing his reopened wounds and applying bandages to them between stolen kisses. In the morning, Hannibal would take the car away, take their organs, take the bodies somewhere they won't be found. And decide what to do about Mason's body *that was in Will's shed freezer.* But that would come later, "I'm inclined to believe you won't steal anything from me anymore." He mused, looking around at the mess they'd made of their clothes and bed- *their bed?*- going back over to where Will was lying.

Will rolled onto his front, sidling up to him as Hannibal moved across his back and kissed behind his ear, humming in reply: "It's too late for that."

Tired eyes met his still full of mischief when he collapsed down next to him. His presence was like a a shielding wall to Will as he laid on his side towards him. He mindlessly thought that his is a presence he could become more than use to; wanting to wake up next to him, oddly enough. He felt-- secure. Untouchable. A grin crept onto Will's face, almost mockingly, as Hannibal studied him, "Why is that?"

Will didn't answer for a moment, intent on looking smug and overtly pleased with himself. And yet, he mumbled it, as if to soften the gravity of such a statement, unadulterated-- the sentiment behind it probably the truest thing he's said in his entire life. Shit-eating grin plastered on his face as he said it though, definitely too pleased with himself:

"Because I stole your heart."

Chapter End Notes

Holy shit, it's over. I didn't expect so much support on this- I literally wrote it as a oneshot piece and all you beauties told me to continue it. I hope this is a fitting end! Thank you endlessly for all the comments and kudos, it's been a wild ride, huh?

Fortunately, the next thing I'm working on is Serial Killer/Hitchhiker AU based on that one prompt about "surely serial killers who pick up hitchhikers have picked up another serial killer before?" so if that appeals to you feel free to keep your eyes peeled. Other than that, I thank you again. You're wonderful.

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